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The Political Philosophy of Spinoza

A seminar offered in the autumn quarter, 1959
The Political Science Department, the University of Chicago

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Session 1: no date

Leo Strauss: [in progress] —and this great phenomenon called German idealism can only be understood due to the confluence of the thought of Kant on the one hand, and Spinoza on the other; and so there is very much of Spinoza in such thinkers as Hegel and the rest. But there was of course also a great contemporaneous influence of Spinoza already in the late seventeenth and[1] [early] eighteenth century.

But to turn now to the much more pertinent question of the relation of Spinoza to the tradition: Why is this question of any importance? Let us never forget that we are political scientists and we are interested in Spinoza not for historical reasons but because we are concerned with the theory of democracy. We have some reason to believe (and we will formulate the reasons for that later) that Spinoza is the first philosopher of liberal democracy. Let us leave that for the time being. Why should we care about[2] [his] relation to the tradition? Why study Spinoza? Why is this question of his relation to the tradition of any relevance? It is of some importance for the understanding of liberal democracy, of the society in which we live, to be clear, that it is a relatively recent phenomenon—that is, a typically modern phenomenon. Therefore liberal democracy as we know it presupposes somewhere and somehow a change[3] [from] earlier modes of thinking, and all changes of any importance are at some point a break with earlier ways of thinking. Therefore by investigating Spinoza's relation to traditional political philosophy, we begin to understand the meaning of that break.[4]

Now [turn to] volume 2, page 388, paragraph 2.[i] That is one of the letters of Spinoza, letter[5] 60. That is the most simple statement of Spinoza about his relation to the great tradition.[6]

Reader:

> The authority of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates, does not carry much weight with me. I should have been astonished if you had brought forward Epicurus, Democritus, Lucretius, or any of the atomists, or upholders of the atomic theory. It is no wonder that persons, who have invented occult qualities, intentional species, substantial forms, and a thousand other trifles, should have also devised spectres and ghosts, and given credence to old wives' tales, in order to take away the reputation of Democritus, whom they were so jealous of, that they burnt all the books which he had published amid so much eulogy.

LS: Let us stop there. Now that refers to a tradition according to which Plato had bought all the books of Democritus and had them burned. Now let us stick to the important point, the authority of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle carries not much weight with me, but Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius [does]. What does that mean?

These are the atomists. What happened in modern times at the beginning was a break, in the first place with Aristotle, in the second place, also with Plato. And this break[7] was accompanied by a

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[i] Benedict de Spinoza, *The Chief Works*: *A Theologico-Political Treatise* and *A Political Treatise*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (London, George Bell and Sons, 1891).

simultaneous return to the anti-Platonic, anti-Aristotelian, anti-Socratic classical thinkers and especially the atomists. That you will find throughout the seventeenth century and [it] has been of course effective up to the present day in modern science. Spinoza's whole philosophy is connected with the emergence of modern science, and his statement is an indication of that.

This raises a very great difficulty. This atomistic or materialistic philosophy of Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius was wholly non-political. They had certain opinions about the character of political things and developed them, but they were not political thinkers proper. The famous formula of Epicurus was *lathe biosas*: Live retiredly, do not concern yourself with political things. Spinoza on the other hand was passionately political, as we may see from his books,[8] [though] it is also known biographically. In a notebook he portrays himself in the garb of Masaniello, a revolutionary later in the seventeenth century, by which he indicated his sympathy with this revolutionary movement.[ii]

Spinoza was passionately political. Now this is a point of some importance: the combination of a materialistic philosophy with a political doctrine, with political enthusiasm[9] [or] political idealism, is a modern phenomenon. The premodern, traditional political philosophy was antimaterialistic. In premodern times either you were a spiritualist in whatever sense (then of course you could be a political philosopher)[10] [or] you were a materialist, [in which case] you were already by this very fact not a political philosopher. That is an important point.

What Spinoza seems then to achieve (that is the first formulation I can suggest) is a synthesis of the materialistic doctrine, a fundamentally materialistic doctrine with a political inspiration. [11]A change of this magnitude is never possible in the case of the serious man by a mere eclecticism, that he takes out this part from the materialistic philosopher, and that part, say, from Plato or Aristotle. It requires then the emergence of a new plane of thought, a new plane which did not exist before. How can you define that new plane on which Spinoza, among others, settled? Now let us turn to a passage in the *Political Treatise* at the end of chapter 5 (page 315 in your edition), paragraph 2.

Reader:

> But what means a prince, whose sole motive is lust of mastery, should use to establish and maintain his dominion, the most ingenious Machiavelli has set forth at large, but with what design one can hardly be sure. If, however, he had some good design, as one should believe of a learned man, it seems to have been to show, with how little foresight many attempt to remove a tyrant, though thereby the causes which make the prince a tyrant can in no wise be removed, but, on the contrary, are so much the more established, as the prince is given more cause to fear, which happens when the multitude has made an example of its prince, and glories in the parricide as in a thing well done. Moreover, he perhaps wished to show how cautious a free multitude should be of entrusting its welfare absolutely to one man, who, unless in his vanity he thinks can please everybody, must be in daily fear of plots, and so is forced to look chiefly after his own interest, and, as for the multitude, rather to plot against it than consult its good. And I am the more led to this opinion concerning that most far-seeing man, because it is known that

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[ii] Tommaso Masaniello (1620-1647) led a revolt against the Hapsburg rule of Spain in 1647.

> he was favourable to liberty, for the maintenance of which he has besides given the most wholesome advice. (*PT*, 5. 7)

LS: This passage alone of course does not prove what I am going to say, but if you were to read Spinoza you would see that I am right. Spinoza has not praised any preceding political thinker as highly as he praises here Machiavelli. Machiavelli is *the* most important political thinker for Spinoza. [He uses] such terms[12] here as the "most prudent," "wise," the "most ingenious," or the "most acute" —and the reason[13] is that Spinoza believes that Machiavelli was a republican (that is obviously connected) and that he wrote *The Prince* only in order to warn the people of such a thing as absolute monarchy.

Incidentally, what is the situation in Machiavelli, without going in any way deeper into the issue? Where does Machiavelli stand as far as this great issue of the rule of the people is concerned? Well, you see there are two writings of Machiavelli. One is seemingly monarchic, the *Prince*, and one is seemingly republican, the *Discourses on Livy*, and Spinoza understands that the *Discourses* are the *magnum opus* of Machiavelli. At any rate, one point must be mentioned. There is only one chapter in Machiavelli's work in which he attacks all earlier writers, *all* earlier writers, and that is book 1, chapter 58, of the *Discourses*. And what is the subject? All earlier writers, he says, have blamed the multitude for its grave defects: changeability, and emotionalism, and what have you. Machiavelli defends the multitude against its detractors. In other words, this shows a certain democratic bias which Machiavelli surely has, compared with Plato and Aristotle, without any question. So in other words, there is [also] something in Machiavelli which[14] prepare[d][15] Spinoza's thought. In other ways, this will come in later. By the way, this book called the *Political Treatise*, from which we read, was not published by Spinoza during his lifetime but was only published posthumously.

I raise here[16] [a] question to which I do not know the answer. Who has spoken, prior to Spinoza, with such praise of Machiavelli? I do not [know]—do you know? If I remember well, Hobbes never mentions Machiavelli, [not] a single time. Yes, but that's the point: now you must not forget that names were terribly important in former times. The name of a, how should I say, of a dangerous writer—to praise the name of a dangerous writer is almost meant to identify yourself with these terrible things, so that is impossible. If I am not mistaken, Hobbes does not mention Machiavelli a single time. Bacon does mention him with some praise, for example in the *Advancement of Learning*, but that has nothing to do with the love of liberty; it has something to do with other things. I think also Algernon Sidney (that is about Spinoza's time) refers to Machiavelli in praising terms.[iii] But not quite [17][in the] strong terms, if I remember well, as Spinoza does. This only in passing.

At any rate, this way of speaking of Machiavelli shows[18] an unusual boldness [for the time]. That Spinoza was unusually bold was stated by a very bold writer called Hobbes. When Hobbes read the *Theologico-Political Treatise* in 1670, he said to Aubrey—Aubrey is the author of the most

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[iii] Algernon Sidney (1623-1683), a republican political theorist in England, best known for *Discourses Concerning Government*, a work in opposition to the theory of the divine right of kings, especially as put forth by Robert Filmer.

charming life of Hobbes; Aubrey wrote a number of "lives"[iv]—[19] and then he[v] said that it had gone through him; [that is], the *Theologico-Political Treatise* had gone through Hobbes a vast length. He himself had not dared to write as boldly. Now you know Hobbes is well known for his iconoclastic boldness, but he still says that he was not as bold as Spinoza. Hobbes surely had the impression that there was a fundamental agreement between him and Spinoza, and that is strange because Hobbes was neither a liberal [n]or a democrat, as everyone knows. But Spinoza had indeed much to do with Hobbes. There are two utterances of Spinoza regarding Hobbes which we should consider. First, in the volume which you just used on page 276, the third paragraph.

Reader:

> "Every member of it may, if he will, be free." Whatever be the social state a man finds himself in, he may be free. For certainly a man is free, in so far as he is led by reason. Now reason (though Hobbes thinks otherwise) is always on the side of peace, which cannot be attained unless the general laws of the state be respected. Therefore the more a man is led by reason—in other words, the more he is free, the more constantly will he respect the laws of his country, and obey the commands of the sovereign power to which he is subject. (*TPT*, 16, n. 27)

LS: Now, can you understand that statement? You see the only statement, the crucial statement of Spinoza on Hobbes deals with the difference between him and Hobbes. And these are the only statements.[vi] What does he say? What does Hobbes do and what does Spinoza do in opposition to Hobbes?[20] In other words, we see that Spinoza is more in favor of freedom than Hobbes. But what is the theoretical expression of this difference?

Student: Spinoza uses natural right, but as I recall, Hobbes also uses a natural right, although modified.

LS: Yes. Very good. But what is the difference? For example, "I always preserve natural right intact" implies Hobbes does not always preserve natural right intact. Now this is in itself a cryptical formula. Can you make any sense of that? What does Hobbes do to the natural right by not keeping it intact? What does that mean? Well, according to Hobbes and to Spinoza, every man has a natural right to self-preservation and this leads according to Hobbes—primarily if there is no government—to the right of everybody to everything. This right of everybody to everything has to be ceded to the common power. Hobbes does not keep the natural right intact. Spinoza does this in a way, but let us leave this for the time being. I only want to give you the first external evidence that we will later on try to understand.

[iv] John Aubrey, *'Brief Lives,' chiefly of Contemporaries, set down by John Aubrey, between the Years 1669 & 1696*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1898).

[v] That is, Hobbes.

[vi] There appears to be a break in the tape or other problem with the transcript. As Strauss says a paragraph above, there are two known references by Spinoza about Hobbes. This use of plural in this paragraph indicates that both statements have been discussed. Additionally, in the following paragraph, Strauss quotes the other known reference, "I always preserve natural right intact" (from letter 50, to Jellis) as if it has been read aloud. Strauss returns to both of these Hobbes references in greater detail later in the course.

As I said, Spinoza speaks only of his disagreement with Hobbes. That is misleading. He agrees with him very much as you will see if you read, for example, the sixteenth chapter of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* and the corresponding chapter of the *Political Treatise*. I mention only a few terms which are crucial in both writers and which stem in this meaning from Hobbes. The state of nature is the key term in Hobbes, and is accepted by Spinoza. The right of nature or the natural right is, in the sense used by Spinoza, taken from Hobbes, and Hobbes originated it. I must explain this briefly, although I have spoken of it on other occasions, but I think one must treat each class as an independent unit. The characteristic thesis of Hobbes is that the fundamental moral or political fact is the right of self-preservation as a natural right. Now the crucial point is[21] this: that this is the fundamental moral fact. It is not derivative from any earlier moral fact. According to the traditional view all rights which a man might have are derivative from what we may call an objective order or, more practically stated, the fundamental facts were duties rather than rights. Hobbes inverts this order. Man has primarily only a right without any strings attached to it, and only secondarily does this right give rise to duties. This fundamental change in moral orientation which was effected by Hobbes was accepted by Spinoza. And in this connection the term "state of nature" is introduced by Hobbes and taken over by Spinoza.

In the ordinary textbook literature, the term "state of nature" is ascribed to all kinds of men who never dreamed of a state of nature. For so many speak of Greek or Roman writers who never use the term in this sense.[22] [These writers] say "state of nature" and they mean simply a state[23] in which there is no government. Such a condition of men was of course admitted by many people prior to Hobbes, but they didn't call it [a] "state of nature" and the term is of some importance.

I will again explain this briefly if only parenthetically. The term "state of nature" as used by Hobbes does not stem from the philosophic tradition at all but from the Christian theological tradition, and in the Christian theological tradition a distinction was made between the state of nature and the state of grace. The state of nature was subdivided into [the] state of pure nature, prior to the fall, and the state of corrupt nature. Against this background one must see how Spinoza sees the state of nature, because when Hobbes speaks of the state of nature, what is equivalent to it? What is the corresponding thing? What corresponds to it?

Student: [inaudible][vii]

LS: Yes, but in terms of a state, of status? A state of civil society. Now if you contrast these formulae you have the secret of Hobbes, in a way. There is no subdivision between pure and corrupt nature, between [a] state of pure nature and [a] state of corrupt nature. There is no corruption; hence, you do not need grace. The state of nature is imperfect or, as Locke is going to say later on, has its inconveniences. Therefore you will need something in addition, not grace but human government. I cannot go into this question further. I only want to emphasize the fact that [the] state of nature meant in the traditional literature a state in which non-Christians and non-Jews are.

The state of Jews is the state of the law. The state of Christians is the state of grace. The state of nature is just the state in which the American natives were when they were discovered by the Spaniards. They lived in the state of nature not because they didn't have government; they had

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[vii] The transcript does not indicate a student's comment, but it seems clear that Strauss responds to one.

their government, at least in Mexico and in Peru, but they didn't have the law, the divine law, nor did they have grace. They lived only by virtue of their natural faculties. That was the meaning of the term. Hobbes changed that radically, and Spinoza followed him here.

Now I have mentioned the two thinkers preceding Spinoza who prepared his thought decisively, and these were Machiavelli and Hobbes. I have not explained[24] what their influences consisted [in], but we will take this up later. But I appeal only to the general impression every one of you has even if[25] [you have] never read Machiavelli or Hobbes. Machiavelli and Hobbes are known as very tough people, not to say vicious. This impression, while not literally true perhaps, is not misleading. There is really an important difference between Spinoza on the one hand, and Machiavelli and Hobbes on the other. We have to define this provisionally. Neither Machiavelli nor Hobbes were in favor of liberal democracy, let us say. Let us indicate the difference a bit more precisely. But more than that, the status of virtue, and primarily of moral virtue, is much higher in Spinoza than it is in either Machiavelli or in Hobbes. Spinoza, we may say, grafts morality in a higher sense somehow on Machiavelli and Hobbes. This moral teaching which Spinoza accepted to a considerable extent, not completely, was the teaching of the Stoics, the Stoic notion of the wise man of self-control. Spinoza grafts a teaching of Stoic origin on[to] a Machiavellian-Hobbean trunk.

I [will] restate that. It is not more precise but it brings out another point. The notion which characterized the classical position was [that] speculation, or theory, *theoria*, contemplation, was the highest [inaudible].[viii] Spinoza grafts this notion of the supremacy of contemplation on a Machiavellian-Hobbean basis. And here one sees the difference very clearly, for in Machiavelli you find barely an allusion to contemplation, and Hobbes even rejects the contemplative ideal, as it is called, explicitly. Science is for the sake of power, Hobbes says, not for its own sake. Spinoza restores an important part of the classical heritage but on the modern basis, and this is the reason why I myself am now interested in Spinoza.

What happened in modern times was this. In the first phase of modern thought, as we may say, a clear-cut break with classical thought, especially of classical morality, occurs. And then after this first phase has as it were spent itself, people saw that something of the utmost importance has been lost and they try to restore it. The greatest names in this respect probably are Spinoza, Leibniz, and Shaftesbury, who all returned to classical antiquity out of an awareness of the very great loss. The history of modern thought is so complicated because of these restorations or renaissances, which have taken place more than once. But the first great renaissance of this kind after the break—the Renaissance proper was of course not a break but only a reassertion of classical thought. But the great break which took place from Machiavelli on, and especially in the seventeenth century with the emergence of modern science, that led to an attempt to restore an important part of the lost heritage. And in this respect Spinoza is of special importance.

What we have to do first then is to understand what precisely the break with classical thought, with premodern thought meant, and how far it is effective in Spinoza. Now in order to do that, to understand that, we may perhaps read two passages in Spinoza. The first is in the *Ethics*, [at] the beginning, the preface to the third part.[26]

[viii] There is a blank space in the transcript.

Reader:

> Most writers on the emotions and on human conduct seem to be treating rather of matters outside nature than of natural phenomena following nature's general laws. They appear to conceive man to be situated in nature as a kingdom within a kingdom: for they believe that he disturbs rather than follows nature's order, that he has absolute control over his actions, and that he is determined solely by himself. They attribute human infirmities and fickleness, not to the power of nature in general, but to some mysterious flaw in the nature of man, which accordingly they bemoan, deride, despise, or, as usually happens, abuse: he, who succeeds in hitting off the weakness of the human mind more eloquently or more acutely than his fellows, is looked upon as a seer. Still there has been no lack of very excellent men (to whose toil and industry I confess myself much indebted), who have written many noteworthy things concerning the right way of life, and have given much sage advice to mankind. But no one, so far as I know, has defined the nature and strength of the emotions, and the power of the mind against them for their restraint.
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> I do not forget that the illustrious Descartes, though he believed that the mind has absolute power over its actions, strove to explain human emotions by their primary causes, and, at the same time, to point out a way, by which the mind might attain to absolute dominion over them. However, in my opinion, he accomplishes nothing beyond a display of the acuteness of his own great intellect, as I will show in the proper place. For the present I wish to revert to those, who would rather abuse or deride human emotions than understand them. Such persons will doubtless think it strange that I should attempt to treat of human vice and folly geometrically, and should wish to set forth with rigid reasoning those matters which they cry out against as repugnant to reason, frivolous, absurd, and dreadful. However, such is my plan. Nothing comes to pass in nature, which can be set down to a flaw therein; for nature is always the same, and everywhere one and the same in her efficacy and power of action; that is, nature's laws and ordinances, whereby all things come to pass and change from one form to another, are everywhere and always the same; so that there should be one and the same method of understanding the nature of all things whatsoever, namely, through nature's universal laws and rules. Thus the passions of hatred, anger, envy, and so on, considered in themselves, follow from this same necessity and efficacy of nature; they answer to certain definite causes, through which they are understood, and possess certain properties as worthy of being known as the properties of anything else, whereof the contemplation in itself affords us delight. I shall, therefore, treat of the nature and strength of the emotions according to the same method, as I employed heretofore in my investigations concerning God and the mind. I shall consider human actions and desires in exactly the same manner, as though I were concerned with lines, planes and solids.[ix]

LS: That is a very famous statement, and that is the program of Spinoza's *Ethics*. What appears here? First, a perfectly theoretical treatment of the passions like mathematical objects. A

[ix] In *The Chief Works of Benedict De Spinoza*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes, vol. 2, part 3, preface, 128-29.

perfectly theoretical treatment. What was the traditional treatment of the passions? The simplest case is that of Aristotle's *Ethics,* a practical treatment. The passions have to be controlled, and therefore uncontrolled passions are bad in different degrees for different passions, but there is need for control. And the primary question was the control of these passions, a practical problem. For Spinoza, the passions are primarily a theoretical subject, although the question of their control is obviously important in any case. But primarily the study of the passions is as theoretical as that of, say, heavenly bodies, or the human body or what have you. That tells us something that is very important. You see, he says here [that] the effects of hatred, anger, envy and so on considered in themselves follow from this same necessity and virtue of nature as all other particular things. In other words, these passions we must control, otherwise we will be unhappy. But they in themselves can be[27] great phenomena, admirable phenomena. In modern novels, especially since the nineteenth century, this has repeatedly been done: the great writers presented really devilish passions sometimes, with a high degree of admiration for the power of nature, the work of nature shown there. To me, the most striking example is a novel by Balzac, *La cousine Bette*, *Cousin Bette*[x]—I don't know whether you know[28] [it]—where he relates incredible power and viciousness. And it is quite clear that the novelist, by presenting it, enjoys the display of the tremendous natural power although [it is] directed entirely to evil. Something of this admiration appears later in the *Ethics* of Spinoza to that effect. But the main point which we raise near the beginning is this: man does not form a state within the state, a kingdom within the kingdom. The human things are as natural as all other things.

You know that has become today absolutely trivial. A thing called naturalism has a very great power in modern thought, and that is exactly what Spinoza has in mind. In Spinoza's thought, however, this naturalism means also what it does not necessarily mean today, determinism. There is no freedom of the will in men, as in a falling stone. This point which men made prior to Spinoza, especially in Hobbes's work, refers to the crucial point we have to mention. Now let us come a bit closer to our issue by taking the first chapter of the *Political Treatise,* the beginning, on page 287.

Reader:

> Philosophers conceive of the passions which harass us as vices into which men fall by their own fault, and, therefore, generally deride, bewail, or blame them, or execrate them, if they wish to seem unusually pious.

LS: You see, that is only a stronger statement than the one we read before in the *Ethics*: judging of the passions in term of good and bad is not legitimate, at least not primarily. You know the value judgments. That's one of the rules here. Spinoza would not adhere to that but the primary statement is really to that effect. Go on.

Reader:

> And so they think they are doing something wonderful, and reaching the pinnacle of learning, when they are clever enough to bestow manifold praise on such human nature, as is nowhere to be found, and to make verbal attacks on that which, in fact, exists. For they conceive of men, not as they are, but as they themselves would like them to be. Whence it has come to pass that, instead of

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[x] Honoré de Balzac, *Cousine Bette* (1846).

> ethics, they have generally written satire, and that they have never conceived a theory of politics, which could be turned to use, but such as might be taken for a chimera, or might have been formed in Utopia, or in that golden age of the poets when, to be sure, there was least need of it. Accordingly, as in all sciences, which have a useful application, so especially in that of politics, theory is supposed to be at variance with practice; and no men are esteemed less fit to direct public affairs than theorists or philosophers.
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> But statesmen, on the other hand, are suspected of plotting against mankind, rather than consulting their interests, and are esteemed more crafty than learned. No doubt nature has taught them, that vices will exist, while men do. And so, while they study to anticipate human wickedness, and that by arts, which experience and long practice have taught, and which men generally use under the guidance more of fear than of reason, they are thought to be enemies of religion, especially by divines, who believe that supreme authorities should handle public affairs in accordance with the same rules of piety as bind a private individual. Yet there can be no doubt, that statesmen have written about politics far more happily than philosophers. For, as they had experience for their mistress, they taught nothing that was inconsistent with practice. (*PT*, 1. 1-2)

LS: "That was remote from practice." Now you see that what he says is substantially, if in a more condensed way, what he says in the *Ethics*. But this is a bit more intelligible perhaps to us. What does it say here in the beginning of the *Political Treatise*? Did you hear some overtones which you hear also in present-day political science? You see, that is not a novelty. Now what would be a good colloquial term to describe the claims of present-day political science?

Student: Realism.

LS: Realism, not judgment. You see, wishful thinking[29]. What[30] [philosophers] bring us is absolutely useless. Any of these famous theoreticians, Laswell and so on, would say this and have said it. Bentley's *The Process of Government* is a classic of this kind of literature.[xi] But who are the people from whom one can learn something from the present-day "scientific" political science? That is perhaps a slight difference.

Student: Politicians.

LS: The politicians. Yes, the statesmen; but I think the full vigor of the question would come out if we said politicians rather than statesmen. These crafty fellows who[31] really [have] to tackle the hard problems of government, they know something. Any political boss would know more of political things than any of the wisest of the philosophers, of course. But in historical terms, does this introductory[32] passage remind you of an earlier statement about the principle of politics?

[xi] Harold Laswell (1902-1978) was a leading twentieth-century political scientist and communications theorist, and member of the Chicago school of sociology. Arthur Bentley (1870-1957) was similarly an American political scientist interested in epistemology and linguistics. His *Process of Government* (1908) had an influence on the Chicago school.

Student: Chapter 15 of *The Prince*.

LS: Absolutely. This is the most famous chapter in Machiavelli, the fifteenth chapter of *The Prince*, where Machiavelli lays down the law for modernity. And the principle as stated there is this: that up to now the political thinkers have described what men ought to do, and therefore what they have done is utterly useless; I am going to start from how men are, from how men act in fact, and this will lead to the true political teaching. And I believe that this is probably the first imitation of Machiavelli which is as precise and articulate as Machiavelli's own statement. The nature of man as it truly is, [as] opposed to the nature of man which is nowhere—what Machiavelli calls imagined principalities and imagined republics. According to the claim of this modern philosophy, this modern political philosophy, the traditional source was fantastic [or] based on fantastic premises.[33] [It] is a fantastic premise because what both Spinoza and Machiavelli give is a caricature. We have to see through the caricature to see what they have in mind. Now which view do they ascribe to the earlier political philosophers? That is not as clear in Spinoza as it is in Machiavelli in that chapter. Do you remember?

Student: [inaudible][xii]

LS: Yes, but could one not say more simply [that] they somehow believed that man is *good* by nature? And they say: No, man is not good at all; man is very tough, with guile, more vicious than good. Then they were naïve.[34] [It] is of course taken literally, sheer nonsense that Plato and Aristotle should have thought that man is good. But what did they teach which gives some umbrage to what Machiavelli and Spinoza and Hobbes and quite a few others up to the present day said? Man is by nature ordered toward the good. Man strives by nature for the perfection of his nature. This is surely what traditional political philosophy says, and that, they[xiii] deny. Man is not by nature ordered toward virtue, toward his perfection. Why?[35] This reason is given more simply by Spinoza and Hobbes than by Machiavelli: no being is by nature ordered toward anything. To take a simple case of the falling stone, according to Aristotle the stone falls because it is by nature ordered toward the center of the earth, to which it comes as close as possible. According to modern thinking the falling stone is not ordered at all. It is merely a consequence of gravitation; there is no need, no purpose, no teleology for it. And what is true of stones is said to be true equally of all living beings. An animal is a machine, a mere machine. Descartes, and men who went even further than Descartes, like Hobbes and Spinoza, say that man too is not ordered toward any end. There is only necessity: push and pull, no directedness *toward*.

Let me state it differently. The traditional view which Machiavelli almost caricatures by saying they believe that all men are good, or most men are good,[36] can be stated: that man is free. Man has a free will. Man is under no compulsion to sin. If a man sins and if he does something wrong, he is responsible for it. There may be excuses, that is another matter, but ultimately he is responsible. What Machiavelli means, and Hobbes and Spinoza as well, is that man is compelled to do wrong, man is compelled to sin, that nature has not taken care of man in such a way as not to bring him into a situation where he must sin. This is a practical meaning of the doctrine of the state of nature as developed by Hobbes, that man is primarily in a situation in which he cannot

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[xii] The transcript does not indicate a student response, but it seems clear that Strauss is responding to a student's comment.
[xiii] That is, the moderns.

help sinning, and if there are situations in which man does not have to hurt his fellow man, this situation has been created by man, by human government. It never exists by nature.

So in this point which we crudely call realism[37] [lies] the common denominator of all of the great modern thinkers, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Spinoza, whom I mentioned. It appears most clearly in Machiavelli and Spinoza. In Hobbes it appears only on the basis of some analysis, although there is one statement of Hobbes at least, and that is the Epistle Dedicatory to his *Elements of Law*, an earlier work, in which this point comes out also rather clearly.[xiv] We have to start from the fact that man has no natural inclinations, as the tradition tells us, toward the good.[38] What then is the status of the good? Man cannot help being dissatisfied with his situation, and therefore he thinks of alternatives to the bad situation in which he finds himself by nature. He devises something: that is good,[39] what man freely devises in order to live happily. "Freely" is a term that is not quite proper in the case of Hobbes, as he denies freedom proper. Let us therefore say that the good is an idea which man devises by virtue of his reason. It is not something which exists in any way by nature. Man by realizing this must compel himself and can compel himself to move in this direction. There is no primary, natural, innate tendency toward it. Not nature, we can say, but reason supplies the guidance. According to the older view the primary guidance is supplied by nature, and reason[40] comes in[41] very importantly but only in a subsidiary manner.

The question which we must keep in mind is this. I have stated at the beginning Spinoza is the originator of liberal democracy on a theoretical level. Is there a connection between the original version of liberal democracy and this kind of thinking? We must investigate that. I must mention one point which is of very great importance, to which Spinoza refers in one passage which we read in the introductory preface of the third book. There he treats the human passions like planes and solids, like mathematical objects. Spinoza's main work has the title *Ethics Demonstrated in a Geometric Manner*.[xv] Moral science and political science must take on the character of a deductive system. In this respect there is full agreement between Spinoza and Hobbes, [though] not Machiavelli. Machiavelli still has that easygoing empirical side. In Hobbes that is very clear—less clear in the *Leviathan*, which is a very popular writing, but in his most technical book *De Cive*, *On the Citizen*, you see this strict deduction from basic axioms very clearly. In Spinoza it is a bit [clearer], especially in the *Ethics*, which is built up[42] in conscious imitation of Euclid. [43]As I said, in Spinoza the whole[44] political-moral doctrine is deductive.

Now here is the most important difference between Spinoza and Hobbes.[45] In [Hobbes][xvi] the axioms from which[46] [the] moral-political teaching start are according to his own assertion evident to everyone from experience. In order to understand Hobbes's moral and political philosophy you do not have to go beyond his moral [and] political philosophy, [at least for all practical purposes].[47] These axioms are [first], that by nature everybody tries to grab as much as he can carry and in the easiest way possible. He says: Look around you. And[48] the other axiom, that everyone fears violent death, has a grain of truth. Again, that is not deduced from his other

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[xiv] *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic* (1640).
[xv] *Ethica ordine geometrico demonstrata*, perhaps slightly more precisely translated as *Ethics, Demonstrated in a Geometric Order*, so as to distinguish the title from Spinoza's earlier work *Renati Descartes principia philosophiae, more geometrico demonstrata*, which would more accurately be translated as "in a geometric manner."
[xvi] Strauss in fact says "Spinoza," but it is clear from context he means to say Hobbes.

principles; he says: Look around you. Hobbes contends that from these axioms his whole moral and political teaching follows. But as I said, these axioms are easily acceptable. You have only to think about them in effect. That is not what Spinoza contends. Spinoza's axioms[49] [go] much further back and therefore it is much more difficult to follow Spinoza. In his two political writings he has given a very abbreviated form of these axioms, but even in abbreviated form it is very characteristic. Spinoza doesn't start from any human phenomenon as Hobbes does and everyone else did who wrote about politics in the past. Spinoza starts from a general metaphysical, not to say theological, principle from which he deduces his political teaching. That is the great difference. Now this axiom as formulated in his *Political Treatise* is this: God's intellect is identical with God's will. Basically identical. There is no mystery about it, no complications.

Now this leads to very grave consequences. If God's intellect is identical to God's will, it follows that everything which is, is willed by God *as* it is. There cannot be anything evil in itself. This will be discussed later at greater length when we come to the chapters. It means in the formulation of Spinoza that every thing, every being does what it does with a perfect divine blessing. Any being['s] power and any use of that power is perfectly right. Right equal to might. This is deduced by Spinoza in his political writings from the premise that God's intellect and the object of God's intellect, i.e., any being,[50] is identical with God's will; any being, which as such is an object of the Divine intellect, is as such also willed by God. You can say, and people have said, that this is exactly the same disastrous and evil teaching which has underlined Machiavelli and Hobbes. In the textbooks, in the popular books, you find it frequently and not entirely wrong in that. The paradoxical thing [is] that Spinoza tries to build on this most unpromising premise, right is might, a doctrine of free society. I mean, Machiavelli too is concerned with freedom, but in the case of Machiavelli that is a bit dubious because he also wrote *The Prince*—you know that handbook of tyranny, one could say. But Spinoza believes that the equation [of] right to might is the only solid basis of a free society. If we make from the very beginning a distinction between right and might, [we are making][51] a paradoxical contention. This can never be the true foundation of a free society. Is this assertion intelligible? In other words, what has been said *n* times particularly in our century, a tough-minded theory of liberal democracy, that is what Spinoza was driving at. Not an appeal to[52] generous [human] feelings, to the innate noble aspirations, but on the most solid grounds: the ground of inefficacy of right as right. Only if right is might can there be a powerful free society. That is Spinoza's contention. But you see also from this formula the connection with Machiavelli on the one hand, and Hobbes on the other. These are two ancestors of Spinoza's political doctrine. And the strange thing, that out of this unpromising soil, unpromising from the point of view of freedom and virtue, someone should succeed, by perhaps something within the man, perhaps genuinely (that we have to investigate) to develop a doctrine of liberal democracy.

Now on this basis we will begin to study chiefly the two political treatises, but we may have some time near the end of the quarter for reading selected passages from the *Ethics* which will then be interesting to us. The *Ethics* is a very difficult book because it is really built up like Euclid, and one does not understand the *Ethics* if one does not study carefully each demonstration just as you would do Euclid. That is very tough. It is not a book you can read[53] [like] Hobbes's *Leviathan,* or for that matter Machiavelli. But there will be one special question which should become clear to us while we go, which we may study in the *Ethics* toward the end

of the quarter. At the next meeting, the second meeting, we will read the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, preface and chapter 1.

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[1] Deleted "in the beginning of the"
[2]Deleted "the"
[3] Deleted "in"
[4]Deleted "Now I see no one seems to have copies of Spinoza. Do you have one? Very good. Now look up."
[5] Deleted "50"
[6] Deleted "Do you have that? Read it."
[7] Deleted "took place."
[8] Deleted "but"
[9] Deleted "with"
[10] Deleted "if"
[11] Deleted "such"
[12] Deleted "as he uses"
[13] Deleted here.
[14] Deleted did.
[15] Deleted in this way too.
[16] Deleted the.
[17] Deleted "these"
[18] Deleted "at its time"
[19] Deleted "But I have forgotten his first name. Do any of you know?"
[20] Deleted "Yes, in other words here"
[21] Deleted "Here this"
[22] Deleted "They"
[23] Deleted "of nature is a"
[24] Moved "in"
[25] Deleted "he has"
[26] Deleted "on page 128"
[27] Deleted "the"
[28] Deleted "that"
[29] Deleted "philosophy on the one hand"
[30] Deleted "they"
[31] Moved "have"
[32] Deleted "phrase"
[33] Deleted "That man is, yes, but what is a fantastic premise. What"
[34] Deleted "that"
[35] Deleted "And"
[36] Deleted "the traditional view"
[37] Deleted "is"
[38] Deleted and therefore.
[39] Deleted that.
[40] Deleted only.
[41] Deleted in.
[42] Deleted "like Euclid."
[43] Deleted "now this"
[44] Deleted "Doctrine"
[45] Deleted "Because"
[46] Deleted his.
[47] Deleted "That is – from a certain point on – but for all practical purposes you do not have to go beyond"
[48] Deleted "then"
[49] Deleted "are"
[50] Deleted "is God's intellect"
[51] Deleted "that is"
[52] Moved "human"

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[53] Deleted “the Leviathan”

Session 2: no date

Leo Strauss:[1] You saw quite clearly that the beginning of the book, the preface, gives an analysis of superstition, [and that it] has a broader bearing, that it [is] meant to be applicable to much of what goes by the name of revealed religion.[i] That you saw, and that I think is perfectly correct, as we will see more clearly later. On the other hand, there is a very little point—trivial, but we should mention it—where you are not quite right: when you say there is a biblical distinction between prophets and soothsayers and diviners and so on. But the Old Testament uses the mere word prophet of course also of false prophets—the prophets of Baal, you know. That is merely trivial.[2]

Now here in Letter 21[3] the following passage occurs.

Reader:

> And, inasmuch as this wisdom was made especially manifest through Jesus Christ, as I have said, His disciples preached it, in so far as it was revealed to them through Him, and thus showed that they could rejoice in that spirit of Christ more than the rest of mankind. The doctrines added by certain churches—

LS: He means the Trinitarian doctrine.

Reader:

> such as that God took upon Himself human nature, I have expressly said that I do not understand;

LS: And he refers here specifically to the first chapter of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. And now listen to the confirmation.

Reader:

> in fact, to speak the truth, they seem to me no less absurd than would a statement, that a circle had taken upon itself the nature of a square.[ii]

LS: So you see,[4] [the] statement occurring in the published *Theologico-Political Treatise* that he doesn't understand means, in fact: these doctrines are absurd. Spinoza doesn't say, [or] doesn't develop every thought clearly. And quite a few difficulties in reading the *Theologico-Political Treatise* simply arise from the fact that he did not want to go to the length of his own thought. You however have the right flair in your reading, but we must put this on a somewhat broader basis.

Now the general remark which you made is absolutely correct: a new meaning of freedom; and that will be the subject of our study for the time being.[5] When I looked again after many years' absence at the *Theologico-Political Treatise* and saw these many biblical quotations in Hebrew, and some even in Greek, I thought: What an imposition on political science students to ask them to read such a book. But then I recovered very soon, because a moment's reflection showed me

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[i] The session began with the reading of a student's paper. The reading was not recorded.

[ii] In *The Chief Works of Benedict De Spinoza*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes, vol. 2, 299.

that this is one of the key books of liberalism. What we call liberalism emerged in opposition to orthodoxy, to religious orthodoxy. One cannot understand modern liberalism if one does not have some grasp of what the issues were, the theological issues were, the theologico-political issues were through which modern liberalism came into being. In other words, taking a broad historical view and not the strictly theoretical, one can say modern liberalism is primarily religious liberalism, religious liberalism opposed to religious orthodoxy, and this gives liberalism its character up to the present day, although that is no longer so obvious as it was in the seventeenth century.

Now let me explain this briefly a bit. You made some very apt remarks about the fact that no such freedom existed, or was even demanded, in earlier times. The right to religious freedom was partly a consequence of revealed religion, and partly a reaction to revealed religion. What was very roughly the status of religious freedom in classical antiquity? You made a remark about that.[6]

Student: That there was no freedom to be impious. The Greeks' conception of freedom was that it was always obedience to a moral order, and to oppose emotion.

LS: That is not quite sufficient, for the following reason. Modern liberalism [which is] a very powerful force which affects every one of us even if we are not liberals; there are all sorts of hidden effects, modern liberalism has its own mythology, [by which] I mean its own notion of its origin. And part of the mythology was until a very short while ago, I think, that the opposite of religious freedom, i.e., religious persecution, is a terrible invention of the Old Testament: happy pagan antiquity was tolerant. We have to consider this aspect. And by the way, Spinoza plays a certain role here, as you will see from the quotations from Latin authors, Curtius Rufus,[iii] for example, and others are very much connected with this belief: the free, tolerant, classical antiquity versus the persecuting ages of revealed religion, especially the middle ages. Let us look at it from this angle. Was there freedom of expression of religious views diverging from the accepted views in classical antiquity?[7] It is complicated. Practically, to a great extent there was a liberal practice, but it did not have a theoretical basis. That could change from day to day. The principle was [that] one has to worship and therefore respect the gods of the city; and there is plenty of evidence in Plato that this was the reason Socrates was executed: because he did not believe in these gods. In the Roman Empire, to mention the other great model of classical antiquity, there was a very great tolerance in the sense that every conquered tribe could continue worshiping its gods. But they all had to worship also the gods of the empire, i.e., [the] emperor; and there was only a single nation which refused to admit that, and that was the Jews. And the whole trouble which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple were based on this fact: that the Jews simply refused to worship a being who is not the true God.

So there was no legal foundation for religious toleration. There was a practice of it, [and] this practice was very easy. For example, if the Greeks were tolerant to a barbaric trader who came to Athens, and he could worship his gods—well, this barbaric trader did not deny that Zeus was a god, or an[y] other Greek god. There was no conflict. That was connected with the polytheistic character of classical religion which admitted an indefinite variety of different gods, and there

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[iii] Curtius Rufus (d. 53 C.E.), first century Roman historian and author of *Historiarum Alexandri Magni Macedonis Libri Qui Supersunt*.

could not be a conflict. But on the other hand, to question these gods worshiped by the city was a capital crime. Proof: Socrates. He is not the only one. A further characteristic implied in what I said was that there was no formulated dogma. In other words, there was no authority which formulated this, and this, and this, [saying]: these are theological truth[s], and deviation from that was a sin or crime. But there were clear indications of the cult or the worship. I mean, if someone sacrificed to Zeus according to all the rules of custom and said: Well, this Zeus is of course a figment of the imagination, that was a serious matter, very serious. One of the reasons of error on this point is the following fact. In the second book of the *Republic*, Plato represents what some people call an attack on the pagan religion, on polytheism. That is not true. He attacks certain in his opinion impossible stories told by the poets. The poets were naturally men without any authority; they had a certain moral authority but they had no political or legal authority. There is another Platonic dialogue dealing with essentially the same problem, and that is the small dialogue called *Euthyphron*, the subject of which is piety. Now there is a remark there about fundamentally the same kind[s] of stories about the gods. But this time these stories are not ascribed to Homer or Hesiod, poets, but they are found in the robe of the goddess Athena, an official part of the Athenian worship. And there Socrates speaks about this subject with extreme caution, a caution which is completely absent from what he says about the poets and their stories about the gods. So there is no question that there were protected opinions in Athens and in other places, and these protected opinions are one form, of course an elementary form, of dogma.

Now what about the Bible? The liberal tradition, especially in its extremer forms—think of Voltaire—traced the practice of persecution to the Bible. Surely in the Bible that is clear: the severity and legal enforcement was much more clearly stated than in classical antiquity where it was largely a matter of custom. Now what are the evidences? What is the broad and massive evidence in the Old Testament?[8]

Student: [inaudible][iv]

LS: An explicit command to exterminate the seven nations, all these idolaters. That was the explicit command, you had to exterminate them. Other things like that are very striking. These people would have been willing to admit, as one of their prophets says somewhere, I believe at the beginning of the Book of Judges: "Well, we Moabites, a neighboring nation, our God is Chemosh, yours, the Hebrew God, is the God Jehovah. That's it. We can wonderfully coexist, each with his own God!" From the side of the cult of the Hebrew leaders, especially the prophets, there was no possibility of coexistence.[v] There can only be one true image; all the others are false. There are perhaps various degrees of falsity. I suppose that the prophets had a somewhat different notion of—a mild worship of God as contrasted with a rather prurient fertility worship with public prostitution and this kind of thing. These matters entered naturally. But still, in Islam, as far as I know, it is this. The rule of Islam is this: Mohammed was said to be sent to the red and the black, meaning to all men regardless of color: forcible conversion by holy war. But one class of people [were] not to forcibly converted: the people he calls the people of the Book. These were Jews and Christians. They were citizens of second right, of lesser right, but

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[iv] The transcript notes: "Low flying aircraft."

[v] It seems that Strauss is referring to Judges 11:24; however in that speech it is in fact the Israelites offering the possibility of coexistence to the Moabites and not the other way around as Strauss describes.

not to be forcibly converted. What is the principle of Christianity—I mean, of medieval Christianity—with regard to prosecution? Can you state it?[9]

Student: Those who are persecuted are the heretics. They are . . .

LS: What is the definition of a heretic?

Student: A member of a church already who then decides to make his own principles and deny the authority of mother church.

LS: Or any dogma.

Student: Yes.

LS: I see. So in this case, the criminal jurisdiction is no problem. What about non-Christians?

Student: There is no persecution of non-Christians.

LS: Yes, but what about—these things shift into one another—what about toleration? Toleration is not exactly the same thing as non-persecution.

Student: Well, it is rather complex on this point. On some degrees some theologians state that [with] the Jews, for example, and pagans, the Christian Church should rightly exercise no persecution; and St. Augustine, for example, even in the case of the controversies against the Galatians and the Manicheans refused to bring in persecution, except . . .

LS: I remember more clearly the statement of Thomas in *Summa Theologica*. The question of toleration of Jews and infidels is stated as follows: that depends on expediency. That depends entirely on what is expedient, the reasoning being: there is a certain danger coming from religious diversity, a certain danger of corrupting the faith of the believers. And therefore there is a right to expel, but there is no duty to expel. That depends on circumstances. But still there is clearly no right to religious diversity, that is perfectly clear. I mention one other date which is very important, because you sometimes read that this right of religious diversity emerged not through the Reformation itself (Luther and Calvin were as little in favor of religious diversity as the Catholic Church) but as a consequence of the Reformation—the complicated situation, the variety of religions and of sects, and the whole thing became unmanageable and persecution became a hopeless affair. Out of this experience, the practice and then the theory of toleration arose. However important this may be, it is theoretically insufficient for this very simple reason. The Reformation began in 1517. One year before, a famous man, Sir Thomas More, published his *Utopia*, and this is a very clear statement in favor of practically universal toleration. So the theoretical analysis of our problem would have to begin with Sir Thomas More and his possible precursors and not with the later history,[10] however interesting it may be from other points of view.

I spoke last time (and that is a point to which we have to come back) of Spinoza's break with the philosophic tradition, his following people like Machiavelli and Hobbes who had broken away

from the classical tradition. But we must also consider, and we are forced by the text to do so, the break with the theological tradition. Clearly Plato and Aristotle were not theologians, were not Christian theologians. This break must be understood by itself. Now I mention a few points for those of you at least who do not remember these well-known things. Now the position which Spinoza attacks can be stated simply as follows: There is a theological truth, revealed, which is of higher dignity than the philosophic truth. Only the theological truth is indispensable for salvation. You do not have to be a student of philosophy to be saved, but you have to know the theological truth. The source of that theological truth is ultimately God, but in practical terms the Bible and the tradition, the Church. This was the older, the Catholic view, but the Reformation effected a radical change. What is for practical purposes the source of revealed religion among the Reformers?

Student: Not the established Church, the Bible.

LS: The Bible, with one theoretical qualification, and one practical qualification.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: The self-sufficiency of the Bible is the teaching of the Reformers. The Bible is sufficient for salvation, yes, but the Bible properly read. Now what does that mean, to read the Bible properly? The Devil too can quote the Bible; the Devil too can therefore read the Bible. And yet it is of no use for him to read the Bible. It must be read piously. But that is defined more precisely. The truth of the Bible emerges only by virtue of the inner witness of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost, which produced the Bible,[11] [when] effective in the reader, will bring about the meeting of the individual and the text. That is of a very great importance because it leads to all kinds of things regarding the reading.[12] Not all words of the Bible are absolutely unambiguous, and they appear in a very different light. The second point, which is practically decisive, is this: that the Reformers took it for granted that the early Church was not corrupt. And that means in practical terms that the decisions of the first four Councils, if I remember well—the last one was the Nicene Council—are orthodox. In other words, they claimed that the text of the Bible contains such doctrines as [the] Trinity, to mention only the most characteristic one. So in other words, doctrines which from a purely external and historic point of view are not obviously written with large letters in the New Testament were read in the New Testament by Luther and Calvin by virtue of this premise: the Holy Ghost effective in them. Or more practically stated, that the four first Councils were divinely inspired, were orthodox.

But then there came other people out of the mélange, sects of various kinds. I mention only one of them, which is especially important for people like Spinoza. Those were the Socinians.[vi] I don't know whether there are still people around in the world who call themselves Socinians. (Out of them grew Unitarianism; the Unitarians are the heirs of the Socinians.) There were two Italians in the sixteenth century who founded it. Apparently they took the principle of the Reformation—the Bible, and only the Bible is authoritative—very literally. In other words, no

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[vi] The Socinians were an antitrinitarian sect, the name of which is derived from the Sienese Lelio Sozzini (1525-62) and his nephew Fausto Sozzini (1539-1604). The Socinians' influence was widespread in Europe, where they established colleges, held synods, and produced quantities of literature with their printing press.

special qualification by the testimony of the Holy Ghost, by the intervention of the Holy Ghost, [but] merely what you read, what a rational reader would find in reading the Bible.[13] Only what the Bible and especially what the New Testament explicitly teaches is the truth. And the fact that the New Testament is divinely revealed can be proven rationally, by the miracles; therefore, it is a suprarational teaching. What the New Testament teaches cannot be rationally proved, but its suprarationality can be proved, so you remain altogether in the realm of reason.[14] [The Socinians] were of course persecuted. They were called the Polish Brethren because they were persecuted in Italy and Germany and moved to Poland, where they exercised great influence for some generations.[15] [They] also got into trouble there and finally they migrated to Holland, and Holland was the most tolerant country in the world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There also the Socinians existed. Spinoza had personal acquaintances among them.

Now the next step is this: read. The Bible is purely rational. What does this mean? Read the Bible like any other book, like you would read Tacitus or Thucydides or whatever it may be. And then you see not only difficulties, but you see also contradictions. Furthermore, the great questions of authorship arise. Here you have at the beginning the Five Books of Moses, and the burial of Moses inclusive. Is this history? And then they applied—but that is already a somewhat later development—they applied the ordinary principles of historical criticism. And they said: If you find a book allegedly written by an author in which you find a description of the death and burial of that author, then you cannot say that he is the author of the book. That was an old difficulty, but now the conclusion was drawn without hesitation. But there are other passages of a similar character, for example, in the Pentateuch. We will come across them later on in Spinoza, which also make it doubtful whether Moses was the author.

Now let us limit ourselves to this example. Here is in a way the fundamental book because it is the first and most important part of the Old Testament, written, as we have it, by an uncertain author, an unknown author. What can be its authority? These difficulties are underlying the higher criticism, which later on also was extended to the New Testament of the Bible, which has been victorious completely in the nineteenth century and of course is today the generally recognized thing. The natural result of this development was [that] you cannot find in the Bible an authoritative teaching of any kind. You find certain very profound passages which have a certain evidence, but you find all kinds of things, for example, monotheism, which seems to be at least above polytheism. But then they say: Look at the Hebrew word for God, which is a plural. A plural construed with the singular with the verb, but sometimes it is also construed with the plural. And then there are references to beings which are called the sons of God, and all kinds of things. Where do you draw the line? The conclusion: the Old Testament at any rate is a work which was brought together from relics, literary relics stemming from many different centuries, and compiled from sources which have been completely lost, and compiled by people who had no more authority than you or I, who did their best. [But] the book is still extremely difficult to understand.

Now this is a notion of the Bible which was stated first in our time explicitly by Spinoza, and therefore in the history of higher criticism of the Old Testament he is well known today. This one must keep in mind. The conclusion is this: [no Christian sect has a sufficient biblical ground for claiming predominance]. That is not explicit in Spinoza[16]; [it is] a common one[vii], but of course

[vii] That is, a common conclusion.

never accepted by any orthodox [Jew or] Christian[17], regardless of whether Catholic or Protestant.[18] The Bible does not teach the argument that the Bishop of Rome, the pope, is the authority; they question the meaning of the institution of Peter, meaning that—nor does the Bible justify the Episcopalian order in opposition to the Presbyterian or what have you. No Christian sect has a sufficient biblical ground for claiming[19] sovereignty. On the basis of the belief in the Bible as a whole, i.e., Old Testament and New Testament, the practical consequence is that all Christian sects, i.e., all the sects which recognize both Testaments, must be tolerated. But this was enlarged to the tolerance also of non-Christians, for example, of Jews. Now how was this possible? Because here we still have as the indispensable basis the recognition of both Testaments, and we find a trace of that already here in what we read. How do we come from the toleration of all Christians to a practically universal toleration on the basis of Spinoza's argument as explicitly stated? What does he say?

Student: He denied the authority of the Bible.

LS: No, no. That is the difficulty. You see, Spinoza argues on two levels, otherwise he could not get the effect which he wanted. He argues on the basis of the Bible, and he also questions that authority. He does both simultaneously. That is the difficulty of the *Treatise*, but with a little bit of serious effort one can disentangle the two arguments. Now how would the argument run on a biblicist basis? To repeat, the part of the argument which we have up to now is this. On the basis of the Bible, no Christian sect can claim to be truer than any other Christian sect. Baptists strictly speaking, and Anabaptists, Trinitarians, Unitarians—[none][20] of them can really prove its thesis, and therefore the only fair thing, if the Bible is the authority, is to tolerate every Christian sect. But how to enlarge the toleration from all Christians to make it universal toleration? What is the gimmick (if I may use a vulgar expression)? What is the characteristic teaching of the New Testament according to this liberal view?[21]

Student: Love thy neighbor.

LS: Charity. Everything may be obscure in the Bible, [but] one thing is clear: the command of charity. But if charity, no persecution. That is the very rough outline of this tremendously powerful thought in modern times. But a powerful thought is not for this reason a deep thought; that we must always keep in mind.

Now a word about Spinoza's peculiar position in this affair. Spinoza was not a Christian. You must never forget that. He was a Jew, but an excommunicated Jew who wrote this work anonymously. It very soon leaked out who the author was. The polemical writers all knew who the author was.[22] I do not know how it leaked, but he wrote it anonymously. And yet the book carries on its title a New Testament quotation, as you will [see].[23] "By this we know that we remain in God and God remains in us, that he has given us from his spirit." John, chapter 4, verse 13. This verse is discussed later on in the book in chapter 14. In other words, a reader who doesn't know what we know would think that [this is] a book written by a Christian. But when he comes to read the book, he will be surprised by the fact that the emphasis regarding the matter is entirely on Old Testament material; there are infinitely more chapters devoted entirely to the Old Testament than to the New. Now one can explain this most simply by the fact that Spinoza had had a Jewish training, not a Christian training, and he knew the Old Testament much better

than the New one. That is not quite sufficient, but it has a certain plausibility. I mention here only one point where his Jewish traditional background is important for understanding the book. You see, the [first six chapters of the] book[24], which are perhaps the emphatically theological chapters, deal with these three themes: prophecy, chapter 1 to 3; law, divine law, chapters 4 to 5; miracles, chapter 6. We have here the order: prophecy, law, miracles. Now miracles belong to the context of providence, and we can therefore say providence. This order: prophecy, law, providence, is an order which was used by Jewish medieval thinkers, and [it] goes ultimately back to an Islamic tradition. It is not a Christian arrangement of subject matter. The underlying idea here being: providence means punishment and reward, [and] presupposes therefore a law. And this law, [the divine law], presupposes[25] an act of revelation, and this act of revelation was called prophecy. This again is more a Jewish and Islamic tradition than Christian. For example, when a Jew or a Christian would say "the prophet says," what will it mean? And if the Koran says "the prophet says"? You can be almost certain that it means one of these prophets who begin in the Bible and lead up to the minor prophets. A Jew would say, and I think a Christian would also say "the prophet says," meaning Moses. But though Moses is a prophet, the term is ordinarily applied to the prophets other than Moses. But when a Muslim says, "the prophet says," what does he mean? Mohammed. There is not the slightest doubt. So in Islam the originator, the founder, was called the prophet, and this emphasis on the very term prophecy came into the Jewish tradition under the influence of Islam. This only in passing; it is of no great importance.

Now let us then turn back to the book itself. First, regarding the title. Now this title, *Theologico-Political Treatise*—titles of that form occur quite often in the humanistic age, the sixteenth and seventeenth century, but the composition, theologico-political, I found only in one out-of-the-way book, which I mention not entirely for the sake of philosophy. A book by . . . probably a Dutchman, I have not taken the trouble . . . who wrote a Latin summary of Bodin's *Six Books on the Republic*.[viii] There is an appendix, of which I do not know whether it is by . . . or whether it is by someone else, which is called *Theologico-Political Corollary*, dealing with the question of Christian education. Someone who can read Latin and[26] enjoys, derives fun from antiquarian studies could very well study that. I mention only one thing which comes to my mind. Bodin [is] the sixteenth century French political philosopher who originated in a way the doctrines of sovereignty and [is] as such mentioned in all textbooks. Now Bodin played an important role in the religious wars of France. He belonged to that small group of men called the Politicians, *Les Politiques*, which did not mean what it means now in America.[27] It meant the people who looked at the religious fights from a purely political point of view, i.e., peace and order. In other words, rather lukewarm religious reform. And this same Bodin wrote a book which was published only centuries after his death, with the complicated title *Heptaplomeres*, the Seven-Fold Book, a book divided into seven parts, which is a dialogue between the adherents of all kinds of religions, including Christianity, Judaism, paganism, Islam and which is known to be a very skeptical book regarding the truth of any of these positions. I wonder whether there is not some connection between the very expression "theologico-political" and this tendency to look at theological problems from a purely political point of view. This much on this kind of thing.

Now, as to the introduction and the first chapter. We must concentrate on the most important things here; there are many details into which we cannot go. As was pointed out in the paper,[ix]

[viii] Jean Bodin (1530-1596) was one of the first great modern theoreticians of sovereignty.
[ix] The student paper read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

Spinoza begins with the subject [of] the causes of superstition.[28] But this has great implications, because Spinoza will contend that very much of the biblical teaching is superstition. So he lays a foundation for that, and then he turns to the subject of the political use of superstition. Now let us assume that there is such a thing as superstition, that men out of fear, out of a general sense of insecurity, imagine all kinds of beings[29], [and] this natural tendency of the human mind is put to political use. That is the first assertion. And in this context Spinoza makes a remark that this superstition arises out of the imaginative and emotional life of man, and not—what would be the alternative to which Spinoza alludes? Do you remember that?

Student: The rational part of man.

LS: From the rational part of man, yes, but Spinoza rejects that explicitly, taking a particular formulation of that thought. Page 4, bottom. Can you read that?

Reader:

> The origin of superstition above given affords us a clear reason for the fact, that it comes to all men naturally, though some refer its rise to a dim notion of God, universal to mankind— (*TPT*, preface)

LS: Yes. That is a bad translation. "Idea of God" is the proper translation. In other words, the alternative interpretation from Spinoza's point of view would be this: all men are born with an innate idea of God, and this idea becomes confused, and then superstition emerges. Spinoza rejects this notion of an idea of God. Now we must consider that for one moment. Who introduced this expression, the idea of God?[30] It has a known origin.

Student: Descartes.

LS: Descartes. Descartes had spoken that man has an innate idea of God, and this was rejected by Hobbes very early, by Spinoza, by Locke, by Leibniz, [so] it became really limited to Descartes himself. As for the passage in Leibniz, [31][see] the *New Essays*, book 4, chapter 10, paragraph 7, in the edition which we use on page 356. This only in passing. So superstition arises only from the emotional, imaginative life of man, not from the rational part; therefore superstition is inconstant, varied, and this creates great social difficulties. If men change their minds about worship, about gods and spirits all the time, that creates a great difficulty; therefore it becomes necessary to freeze, to institutionalize it. This was done all over the world according to Spinoza, but the greatest example is the Turks. The Turks have done this in the most successful manner. There, all thinking about these figments of the imagination and the passions and all this kind of thing is prohibited. We must keep this in mind for later discussions, namely, this: the example of Turkey shows (and there might be other examples) that human freedom, freedom of thought and inquiry, can be suppressed successfully. We will see later on that Spinoza seems to deny that this is possible. We must keep this in mind. And you may remember from more recent discussion; even today you hear sometimes [that] you cannot suppress the spirit of inquiry all the time; for example, the many prognostics made that because the Russians tolerate physics they are bound to tolerate also other activities of the human mind, which is of course a mere superstition to assume that.

But now we must be more precise. Superstition is a very powerful thing in man and therefore it must be institutionalized for the sake of human[s] living together. But here a distinction must be made: that can be done only if you want to have a monarchy. If you want to have a free commonwealth, *libera res publica*, then not. Superstition is a very powerful helper for monarchy. (Monarchy means here absolute monarchy.) A free republic must leave freedom of judgment to each. Not this freedom of judgment[32], especially in religious matters, but the *limitations* of this freedom lead to sedition and other things in a free society[33]. By the way, here of course we have to keep in mind this fact: that such a freedom of judgment for each did not exist in any of the free commonwealths of classical antiquity, and Spinoza knew that very well, he had read the historians, the classical historians. And therefore the question arises, [it] is already implied: the free commonwealth which Spinoza has in mind is a new type of free commonwealth, and we must find [out] what its characteristics are. Now according to Spinoza's contention in the immediate sequel, this freedom of judgment and of worshiping God according to one's own fashion (as Frederick the Great of Prussia called it) is established in Holland and therefore Spinoza does not do anything illegal in writing[34] [this] book. This freedom of judgment and of worship is indispensable for the peace of a republic (not of monarchy), and for piety. Now if it is indispensable for piety, it would seem (and that is a very strange consequence) that there cannot be piety in an absolute monarchy. We must see whether Spinoza continues to maintain this extraordinary thesis. In this connection there is a remark which is also very characteristic and which we should consider, on page 6, the paragraph in the middle of the chapter.

Reader:

> Such is the chief conclusion I seek to establish in this treatise; but, in order to reach it, I must first point out the misconceptions which, like scars of our former bondage, still disfigure our notion of religion, and must expose the false views about the civil authority which many have most imprudently advocated, endeavoring to turn the mind of the people, still prone to heathen superstition, away from its legitimate rulers, and so bring us again into slavery. (*TPT*, preface)

LS: Let us stop here. Now that is also a remark which needs some comment. What Spinoza wants to bring about then is the depaganization of biblical religion. There are still some relics of paganism defacing the true religion. Does this ring any bell? I mean, after all we must, at least to begin with, get back to the climate in which Spinoza wrote; otherwise we will find difficulties where there are none, and on the other hand overlook the real difficulties. What does he mean when he says biblical religion, and especially Christianity, was overlaid by pagan things until a short while ago, and [that] only more recently[35] [have] been taken away? Yes, that is really a stock topic of the Reformation. And Spinoza appeals to this Protestant principle in the widest sense, that the medieval Church came into being by the bringing in of pagan elements, and the Reformation has begun to destroy it and the more radical sects went still further than Luther and Calvin. And Spinoza takes the final step: he will restore the pure teaching of the Bible, especially of the New Testament.

Then he turns to his reasons for writing the *Treatise*. Christianity is the religion of love, and therefore incompatible with persecution. What then happened to Christianity, that the religion of love became a persecuting religion?[36] He gives a brief account. The main point was the establishment of a hierarchy, an ecclesiastical hierarchy, versus the principle: everyone the

judge. That is the issue.[37] Spinoza suggests from a Christian point of view [that] every Christian is equally the judge. From the hierarchical point of view, not everyone is equally the judge. Do you see here something, an importance beyond the theological issue?[38]

Student: [inaudible]

LS: Democracy. Everyone's judgment equal in a democracy, not a qualified republic. Do you see that? And that is a part of the liberal tradition in modern times. Absolute monarchy is allied with an ecclesiastical hierarchy: the *ancien regime*. [The alternative]: abolition of all religious hierarchy and democracy. Up to the present day. I[39] [was] in a discussion somewhere on relativism a short time ago, where I suggested that it is really necessary to have some standards, and this means of course certain legal things and also [that] certain men are better than, higher than others. Then one of my opponents said immediately: Then you bring back the Inquisition. You know, any order means immediately burning at the stake—a conclusion which does not follow, I believe, but that is a sign of the power of this tradition. But let me state it now in terms of the traditional political philosophy, disregarding the origin. The classical tradition was not democratic. It had a certain sympathy for a certain kind of properly qualified democracy, but it was fundamentally not democratic because it absolutely denied that everyone is equally competent to judge. Even as a legal presumption, they never admitted that. Here you see a very potent element driving in this direction. In the theological, ecclesiastical contest there developed a democratic tendency which then affected philosophic thought as well. There is a medieval antecedent to that. Marsilius of Padua is the only medieval writer (fourteenth century) who openly attacked the ecclesiastical hierarchy as [in]compatible with the New Testament.[x] Marsilius of Padua was a follower of Aristotle, as he points out all the time, but he is infinitely more democratic than Aristotle. He quotes certain Aristotelian remarks which are tolerably favorable to democracy but burdens them with weight which they never have in Aristotle himself. Why does he do that? Because in his Christian argument he must establish the equality of the believers in all matters of faith and manners; otherwise, ecclesiastical hierarchy. And this calls for its equivalent in the political field proper, and therefore he has to democratize Aristotle in a way which is historically impossible. And of course you all know from general history [that] there is a tremendous literature on this subject called "Puritanism," which deals with exactly this point, that a religious freedom is a natural ally of political freedom. Especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries there is an enormous literature on this subject. We find it here also in Spinoza, but we have to see more carefully later on when we come to his political teaching proper.

At any rate, Spinoza is confronted with a contradiction between the Christian teaching of love and practice of persecution. Something has gone wrong with Christianity. Christianity has been corrupted; [this is] the whole teaching of the Reformers. But Spinoza draws now the final conclusion,[40] [the] radical conclusion, from that: we must return, radically, to primitive Christianity, and that means to the New Testament. And we must do this in the proper way; that is to say, we must study the New Testament without any prejudices, read it as we would read any other book. But here the ambiguity of what he means comes out very clearly, and that is page 8 at the top of the page.

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[x] Marsilius of Padua (c. 1275-c. 1343) was an Italian political figure and writer best known for his *Defensor Pacis* (*Defender of the Peace*) (1324), in which he sought to show that the pope was not the source of governmental power.

Reader:

> The very vehemence of their admiration for the mysteries plainly attests, that their belief in the Bible is a formal assent rather than a living faith: and the fact is made still more apparent by their laying down beforehand, as a foundation for the study and true interpretation of Scripture, the principle that is in every passage true and divine. Such a doctrine should be reached only after strict scrutiny and thorough comprehension of the Sacred Books (which would teach it much better, for they stand in need of no human fictions), and not be set up on the threshold, as it were, of inquiry. (*TPT*, preface)

LS: Yes. You see, he turns it around. We must go back to the Scriptures. And this Scripture is the document of revealed truth, and forget everything which the theologians claim to know.[41] Up to this point he says by implication [that] there is only one authority: the word of God as delivered in the Bible. Then he turns it around: we must even examine the authority of the Bible. In[42] [his] letters, that would come out even more clearly, that the Bible itself is true and divine cannot be assumed; it must be found out. Perhaps it is not true and divine or is only partly true and divine; therefore, to repeat, the argument of this work is ambiguous throughout. There is a biblicist argument based on the accepted authority of the Bible, but only of the Bible as the word of God; and there is another argument which questions this very premise. The real teaching of Spinoza is not the biblicist argument but the other one. Now then the result of his inquiries, he states in the sequel. We don't have to go into that because that will be developed at great length in the chapters. I think we should consider only one point, and that is what he says about the philosophic part. He speaks first of the theological part. On page 10, paragraph 4. Can you read it?

Reader:

> In order to establish my point, I start from the natural rights—

LS: The plural is not there: natural right. "From the natural right of everyone."

Reader:

> natural right of the individual, which are co-extensive with his desires and power, and from the fact that no one is bound to live as another pleases, but is the guardian of his own liberty.

LS: By the way,[43] we come across that in the sixteenth chapter, where Spinoza asserts that everyone has by nature the right to anything he desires, provided he has the power. Let us go on.

Reader:

> I show that these rights—

LS: [It] is always the singular: right.

Reader:

> can only be transferred to those whom we depute to defend us, who acquire with the duties of defense the power of ordering our lives, and I thence infer that rulers possess rights only limited by their power, that they are the sole guardians of justice and liberty, and that their subjects should act in all things as they dictate: nevertheless, since no one can so utterly abdicate his own power of self-defense as to cease to be a man, I conclude that no one can be deprived of his natural rights absolutely, but that subjects, either by tacit agreement, or by social contract, retain a certain number, which cannot be taken from them without great danger to the state. (*TPT*, preface)

LS: [xi]. . . freedom of speech is indispensable for peace—public order—and also of course, as he claims, for piety. But the starting point of the argument is not freedom of speech but self-preservation, just as in Hobbes. In order to preserve ourselves we must enter society, and therefore we must submit to authority and abandon certain rights which we possessed before. But certain rights, certain things must be retained "as it were by right of nature." He doesn't say here right unqualifiedly. And among these is the right of freedom of speech. The right of freedom of speech is necessary for self-preservation because self-preservation is not possible without government, and government does not fulfill its function properly if there is no freedom of speech.

Here we have another difficulty which you might have discerned. According to Spinoza the government, i.e., the secular arm of the government, is the judge in matters of worship. We must see how this will jibe. Let me state the difficulties here as follows in preparation for our further discussion. I mention only one point at the end of the preface. Spinoza submits the book to the judgment of the authorities. No present-day writer would dream of doing that, although at some point there might well be judicious interference—you know, pornography and certain other things, that still exists. But Spinoza, as well as Hobbes and other writers of this time, explicitly deferred to the censorship of the secular government. What they want to make clear is that they would not recognize ecclesiastical censorship, only secular censorship. So we have perfect freedom of speech and yet a submission of one's inquiries to secular authority. This is a very obvious difficulty. How would Spinoza solve this difficulty in principle? Well, he would say a secular government, a strictly secular government would never interfere with theoretical issues,[44] with issues dealing with theoretical matters, and therefore there would be no conflict.[45] He opposes the hierarchy, the clergy. Everyone is the judge. Mr. ____?

Student: He addresses himself to philosophical readers, and not to everyone.

LS: In other words, while Spinoza has seemingly a democratic tendency by saying everyone is the judge, he also preserves the traditional distinction between the philosophers and the vulgar, between the competent and the incompetent. The question is this: How can he reconcile this prerogative of the philosophers with the equality of all citizens which he also maintains?

I will say a few words only about the first chapter. If one would read this first chapter—I don't know how it reads in the translation, but if one reads it in the original, it becomes perfectly clear that Spinoza, while paying lip service to the notion that there is a divine revelation, denies it

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[xi] It is possible that the tape was changed at this point.

almost in the same breath.[46] [He makes a] clear proposition, which you rightly quoted more than once:[xii] prophecy or revelation is the certain knowledge revealed to men by God. That is a perfectly orthodox definition, but then almost in the immediate sequel—let us perhaps read that, the beginning of the next paragraph where he speaks: "Now it is evident from the definition above given." The past paragraph on page 13, can you read that?

Reader:

> Now it is evident, from the definition above given, that prophecy really includes ordinary knowledge;

LS: No—it may be the translation. I [will] translate: "From the definition above given it follows that natural knowledge can be called prophecy."

Student: It says that prophecy really includes ordinary knowledge.

LS: That is criminal, to translate "natural knowledge" by "ordinary knowledge." [For] such a clear word as "natural" to give place to the unclear word "ordinary!" Natural knowledge can be called prophecy. That is the first step. You see, first we have the orthodox view, supernatural knowledge—natural knowledge. He now says: Well, if you come to think of it, natural knowledge can also be called prophecy. The end result is [that] natural knowledge is the only one which can truly be called prophecy. But let us pursue the next step of Spinoza and see what he says.

Reader:

> for the knowledge which we acquire by our natural faculties depends on our knowledge of God and His eternal laws; but natural knowledge is common to all men as men, and rests on foundations which all share, whereas the multitude always strains after rarities and exceptions, and thinks little of the gifts of nature; so that, when prophecy is talked of, natural knowledge is not supposed to be included. (*TPT*, chap. 1)

LS: You see the next step: natural knowledge can be called prophecy. Why? Because natural knowledge—which includes of course also what we now mean by scientific knowledge—natural knowledge refers everything back to fundamental principles. These fundamental principles must be ultimately one, and that is called by Spinoza God. But you will see later on that Spinoza's God has very little to do with the biblical God. Therefore natural knowledge is knowledge of God. It understands everything—every fall of the stone or every course of a star—as a consequence of a divine decree, the divine decree being a natural law. What does he mean by natural law? That's prophecy. To understand everything in the light of God, in the first place. And then he says: If this can also be called prophecy, why do people regard revealed knowledge as so much higher? And then he says: Well, that is much more flamboyant, and therefore people in the ordinary polity, preferring the flamboyant to the solid, think it is higher. You see, I want to show you how he argues. But let us consider that.

Reader:

[xii] Presumably the student who read a paper at the beginning of the session.

> Nevertheless it has as much right as any other to be called Divine, for God's nature, in so far as we share therein, and God's laws, dictate it to us; nor does it suffer from that to which we give the pre-eminence, except in so far as the latter transcends its limits and cannot be accounted for by natural laws taken in themselves. In respect to the certainty it involves, and the source from which it is derived, i.e. God, ordinary knowledge—

LS: Natural.

Reader:

> natural knowledge is no whit inferior to prophetic—

LS:[47] So that is crucial. Regarding certainty as well as source, natural knowledge is in no way inferior to prophetic knowledge, which could be said by an orthodox man himself. But let us see how he goes on.

Reader:

> unless indeed we believe, or rather dream, that the prophets had human bodies but superhuman minds, and therefore that their sensations and consciousness were entirely different from our own. (*TPT*, chap. 1)

LS: That implies the denial of the possibility of revelation. Do you see that? All human acts, cognitive acts, must be intelligible in terms of the natural faculties of men. That means the denial of revealed knowledge. Why? Because[48] there is a fundamental parallelism between mind and body; now therefore a mind capable of supernatural acts would have as its complement a body capable of supernatural acts. And both things are impossible. He will develop that later.

Now I would like to turn your attention[49] to[50] the most revealing remark, I believe, which occurs in this chapter, and that is in the section where he speaks of the mind of God.[51] [Psalms 33, verse 6.] I translate it literally. "The term 'spirit of God' signifies also, as we have said, the 'breath of God,' which is also improperly ascribed to God in Scripture." That is perfectly okay. God does not have a respiratory system,[52] [nor] mind, temper, and body; mind is improperly ascribed to God. That is a sufficiently clear negative formula explaining what Spinoza understands by God—I mean, not positively clarifying, but negatively. [53]

Now when you look at the[54] [titles] of the first and second part of Spinoza's *Ethics*, you find this formula. Part one: On God; part two: On the Nature and Origin of the Mind. Not of the human mind, but of the mind.[xiii] The mind is not something which occurs in connection with God. That is, I think, a very important point which we must remember.[55] Spinoza's theology is vulgarly known by the heading "pantheism." A pantheistic God is of course not a person; that is trivial. But it is perhaps more precise to say, as Spinoza says here, [that] he cannot ascribe to God "mind" except improperly. If you would now look back on this point to the passage where he speaks of Christ, in whom[56] [his] mind[57] and the mind of God communicated, you [would] see that this is ultimately not Spinoza's opinion. Generally speaking, in this rather popular book,

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[xiii] At the end of the preface to the third book of the *Ethics*, he says he will deal with the human passions, as he has dealt before with God and the mind.

compared with the *Ethics*, Spinoza indicates something—says certain things quite frankly which he does not state with the same explicitness in the *Ethics*.[58]

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[1] Deleted "The only objection I have which is very trivial is you did not type it. If you had typed it, you would have been certain that you kept within the prescribed length, and then your tempo would have been a bit slower, and then it would have been easier for is to follow. So I address this lesson to any successors of yours. But it was clear that you could understand it as well as you did—I suppose that is your first acquaintance with the text—because you are theologically trained, to some extent at any rate. And so you know what the issues are. But you did not read the original in Latin? (No) Well, that is the pity, because quite a few things come out much clearer in the Latin. By the way, Spinoza's Latin is very easy to read. If you can read Thomas you can read Spinoza still more easily. But that is trivial. I mention only one thing. If there is anyone among you who can read simple Latin it would be a good idea to base your paper not on the translation but on the original."

[2] Deleted "There is one passage which occurs there. Unfortunately I have not got it, in the Letters. I thought I had it. That concerns this passage about Christ to which you referred. That occurs in the first chapter somewhere."

[3] Deleted "in this edition page 299"

[4] Deleted "this"

[5] Moved "This new meaning of freedom"

[6] Deleted "What did you say about the status of religious freedom in antiquity?"

[7] Moved "in classical antiquity"

[8] Deleted "Well? Yes?"

[9] Deleted "With regard to persecution"

[10] Deleted "which"

[11] Deleted "is"

[12] Deleted "You know, the same words"

[13] Deleted "And then they can"

[14] Deleted "And these things played a considerable role until they"

[15] Deleted "And"

[16] Deleted "what I said"

[18] Deleted "no Christian sect has a sufficient Biblical ground for claiming predominance"

[19] Deleted "the"

[20] Deleted "neither"

[21] Deleted "Yes?"

[22] Deleted "Still"

[23] Deleted "is this in your edition too?"

[24] Moved "the first six chapters"

[25] Moved "the divine law"

[26] Deleted "and has a certain"

[27] Deleted "But"

[28] Deleted "the causes of superstition"

[29] Deleted "that this exists. That becomes"

[30] Deleted "Who did that?"

[31] Deleted "Mr. —"

[32] Deleted "to each"

[33] Deleted "Then he goes on to say that this freedom of judgment"

[34] Deleted "the"

[35] Deleted "has it"

[36] Deleted "And then"

[37] Deleted "what"

[38] Deleted "Stated. Do you see that?"

[39] Deleted "have been"

[40] Deleted "that"

[41] Deleted "and in that moment"

[42] Deleted "the"

[43] Deleted "when"

[44] Deleted "You know"

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[45] Deleted "The other one is more interesting"
[46] Deleted "Surely, it becomes with the"
[47] Deleted "You see. So"
[48] Deleted "otherwise"
[49] Deleted "only"
[50] Deleted "one"
[51] Deleted "The translation I find out it very unsatisfactory. Well, it is not surprising to me. I don't find it in the text. Let me see which is the verse which he quotes in the context? Psalm 33, verse 6, we should see that somewhere. [Student: In the middle of page 23.] Page 23. Thank you. In the middle. That is of course so completely mistranslated there. But read it. Read the sentence since you have it. Let me see. Maybe it is not exactly the same passage. It must be later. That Psalm must be mentioned again. Alright, middle of page 23."
[52] Deleted "like."
[54] Deleted "Preface"
[55] Deleted "well"
[56] Deleted "the"
[57] Deleted "of Christ"
[58] Deleted "Now I have to turn your attention for a few minutes to a very serious administrative problem. I have only two papers. One read, and the next will be read by Mr. ___"

Session 3: no date

Leo Strauss: You saw the main point as it emerged here but which is on the basis of . . . the thesis itself is clear.[i] No theoretical knowledge of any kind is to be found in the Bible accidentally. On the other hand, the moral doctrine is the true moral doctrine. That is Spinoza's official thesis. We must later on try to understand how this is possible from Spinoza's point of view, that men—[the prophets of the Old Testament]—should possess genuine moral knowledge[1] without possessing genuine theoretical knowledge. Now if you would look at his main work, the *Ethics*, you would see that this is not possible from his point of view. It would be possible if there were such a thing as a conscience informing us about actions, a conscience independent to some degree of theoretical knowledge and the perfection of the theoretical knowledge. Then it would be possible that men would have, could have been enlightened morally while being unenlightened theoretically. But that is not possible in Spinoza, and therefore we must see how he resolves this contradiction. But that is only[2] an indication of the problem. Now you referred more than once, I believe, to the expression that God revealed himself to the Hebrews or to the prophets according to their capacity. What does he mean by that?

Student: Well, they had only a certain amount of theoretical knowledge. They were not too well advanced in natural science. The prophet had a vision in the light of what he understood God to be.

LS: Are these not two different assertions: a prophet imagines God a certain way, and God reveals himself with a view to his capacity? In the one case the relationship to the prophet; in the other, the relationship to God.

Student: I would think they would be fairly interchangeable, because God wishing to reveal himself to the prophet would reveal himself in such a manner as the prophet would understand.

LS: How would this come about that the two terms are practically exchangeable, as you suggest, and I think rightly? But still, they are in this formulation clearly different. How does it come out that they are practically, at any rate, exchangeable? What does it mean that God reveals something, i.e., what is implied in that? What according to the tradition does God reveal?

Student: He reveals himself.

LS: Well, to put it very simply, according to the tradition, God reveals the truth—whether the truth regarding geometry is another matter, but the all-important truth. But now if someone says God reveals himself to men according to their capacities, then the truth is qualified by what the capacities of the receivers will bear. It is therefore no longer the pure truth; and therefore, if the capacity is very small of the recipient, then the true quality of the received message is very small. And therefore it amounts to the same thing: that God reveals himself to the capacity of the individual, as Spinoza understands it, means simply that God never reveals truth as truth. To that extent the two statements are equivalent. In order to understand what Spinoza is doing here, we must try to contrast as briefly as we can the traditional view of the Bible with the view as it

[i] Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

prevails today in strictly secular social science; then we will be able to place Spinoza very simply. Now the traditional view. Yes?

Student: According to the traditional view of the Bible, is the revealed truth of God passed on to man over time through the prophets and through people who were appointed by them?

LS: Truth, surely. But what kind of truth? In other words, the Bible is simply true.

Student: Well, the traditional view of the Bible as all truth.

LS: Sure. But what about mathematics? The example of Solomon which he chose?

Student: That, as I understand it, became a debated issue. But originally anything in the Bible was true; and if he speaks of mathematics, then that too is truth and final truth.

LS: Yes. The tendency would be in this direction.[3] Take the example of the first chapter of Genesis, the most famous example: the six days of creation, and the attempts repeatedly made to find some equivalent at least to these six days in the created world as we know it. So, good. The Bible is the document of revelation. There is no other. The religions of the East, [say, Confucian books or the Hindu books], are not revealed doctrines.[4] This is [of] no interest, only the Bible. What is the view today?

Student: Today they use the expression that Spinoza comes to use later on, that they are books of history, and, particularly the Old Testament, is a record of [the] history of the Jews.

LS: Well, an expression—I don't know whether they use that expression still, but an expression of the Hebrew national mind. And various stages of development on all kinds of levels, higher and lower levels, but not more than that. There are other national minds which have the same dignity, and there is no possibility of ascribing higher value to one of these statements than[5] [to an]other, although[6] the older notion[7] [still survives], for example, [when one speaks] of the great religions. Books appear from time to time in which, say, the religion of some North American Indian tribe is not mentioned, but whereas Confucianism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are mentioned. That still survives, sure; and Spinoza, we can say, is in fact of this modern opinion, in fact. But he does not state it clearly, at least at the beginning of the book. The first great step which he makes in the first two chapters, and to some extent in the third chapter, is to deny any theoretical truth to the Bible, but he still maintains that the Bible contains the moral truth. But since this moral truth exists also among all pagans in the same way, there is no superiority of the Bible in any important respect. This much is clear.

But let me return first to what we discussed last time on the basis of the preface and the first chapter. The beginning is very typical of discussions in the seventeenth century. Spinoza opposes the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and this is primarily anti-Catholic but also against the official teaching of the Reformers, although in some agreement with certain Protestant sects. Everyone must reserve the freedom to judge of religious truth and to worship God as he sees fit. Such freedom is indispensable for the peace of the republic, [though] not for monarchies. Monarchies are helped by the religious authority; and such freedom of religion is indispensable for piety,

which would seem to imply that there cannot be piety in monarchy, and we must see whether this can really be maintained.

Everyone is equally the judge of religious truth. This democratic contention contrasts strongly with the opposition between the philosophers and the vulgar—the few philosophers and the many vulgar minds—to which Spinoza refers in the very preface of his book. The vulgar cannot judge. How can one reconcile this natural superiority of the philosophers which Spinoza seems to assert with everyone's freedom to judge? That is a formulation for Spinoza's problem. The philosophers have the great political or social function, they alone are truly competent (i.e., the right kind of philosopher, men like Spinoza and Machiavelli, not Plato and Aristotle). And yet in another way the polity must be democratic: everyone must have the freedom to judge. How will this work out? We must see.

Now, everyone the judge of religious truth: this assertion might seem to be of religious origin, of Protestant or Protestant sectarian origin. But here there is a certain danger of misunderstanding, because "everybody[8] is equally the judge" was the key assertion of Hobbes prior to Spinoza, without any reference to religious truth. I will explain that. Hobbes starts from the principle that the fundamental moral phenomenon is the right to self-preservation, and then he argues as follows:[9] if the basic right is the right to self-preservation, then I have of course also by nature the right to all means conducive to my self-preservation, for example, to that apple, to that deer, or whatever it may be which preserves me—or for that matter, to that stone with which I can defend myself against an aggressor. But here the difficulty arises: Who is the judge of what means are proper to self-preservation? The traditional view was [that] not every man is equally a good judge. The man of practical wisdom is a much better judge than a moron, and you have all kinds of intermediate positions between the two. Hobbes argues as follows. Since each individual has the greatest interest in his self-preservation, he must be made the judge. A fool has a very great interest in his self-preservation. The wise man is a much better judge of what he should do to preserve himself, but the wise man is not so interested in the fool's self-preservation, in the individual fool's self-preservation, as the individual fool is, and therefore it is prudent for the fool to reserve for himself the judgment. You see, it is interesting to see how this purely prudential practical consideration becomes decisive in an argument which claims to be mathematically demonstrative. You can say what Hobbes suggests is a plausible rule of thumb—as plausible, or less plausible—but it is not more than that. But Hobbes must claim for it absolute certainty, otherwise he cannot get his mathematical political science which he must have. Now here you see in this argument [that] there is no reference to religion, to religious rules whatever. And it is reasonable to assume that Spinoza is more in accord with Hobbes's kind of fundamental democracy than that stemming from the Protestant sects. But this only poses the question which I raised at the beginning of this course: How can Spinoza, on this Hobbean basis, bring in his lofty demands for virtue and philosophy which he, in contradistinction to Hobbes, insists on bringing in? Hobbes was not concerned with these lofty matters in his political doctrine.

Now the intention of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* is the destruction of religious orthodoxy. Of that there can be no question. But this is done on two levels, and I repeat this again. First of all, he takes the literal meaning of the Bible by itself as the authority: all traditional claims or doctrines are to be measured against the literal meaning of the Bible. If the literal meaning of the Bible [does not] support them, they have no basis. But secondly, and that he indicates already in

the preface, he questions the authority of the Bible itself. So his teaching becomes then a purely rational teaching. The biblical or biblicist character of his teaching is purely rhetorical and superficial. The first subject which he takes up is prophecy, but as I emphasized last time and as becomes clear from the first sentence of the first chapter, prophecy simply means revelation.

Student: Just by way of background. I am confused. What was the dominant Church position at the time Spinoza wrote? Was it still that of Aquinas, aside from the Reformation, or what philosopher or theologian would represent or be the background for Spinoza?

LS: That is hard to say. In the first place, in the country in which [Spinoza] lived, Holland, that was a predominantly Protestant country. There were of course Catholic states, but they were in the minority, in the south. Secondly, the brand of Protestantism which was predominant was Calvinism. Don't think of Max Weber, but think of Calvin and his famous doctrine of predestination, and which is perhaps more important, the fact that Calvinism had acquired in the course of the sixteenth century a much clearer political physiognomy by virtue of the fact that according to Calvin himself the New Testament gives divine prescriptions regarding Church government, whereas according to Luther the New Testament does not teach anything regarding Church government and leaves this to secular arrangements, to mere convenience. And therefore Luther was perfectly willing to accept the episcopal system, not that he regarded it as divinely ordained but as useful. Calvin rejected the episcopal system as incompatible with the New Testament, therefore the presbyterian order was the Calvinist order.

But now I come to the crucial point. There was a very strong fight going on in Holland between the monarchic head—the House of Orange—allied with Calvinist preachers and the populace against the upper class patricians in the cities, and these people were ordinarily called Arminians, which was a very lukewarm and rational sort of Christianity. Hugo Grotius, for example, comes out of this urban patriciate.[ii] And[10] the leading man [in Amsterdam] at that time, in Spinoza's time, was Johan de Witt.[iii] De Witt was murdered in a popular riot[11] [during] the war against France at that time.[12] Spinoza was allied with de Witt, i.e., we can say [with] the urban, commercial patriciate[13] (to[14] [some] extent these so-called economic "categories" have some meaning; there was something to that); they were the most "progressive" element, as certain people would say. Spinoza got his political support, to some extent even his private economic support, from these people [like] Johan de Witt. Of course no one could openly challenge the authority of the Bible at that time (that goes without saying), but there were all kinds of sects and there was a great latitude to this extent, and the characteristic name of the Dutch was that they were the first really tolerant country, and they became the model for England. When people like Sir William Petty[iv] came over and saw how tolerance goes so well together with economic

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[ii] Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), a Dutch legal thinker widely regarded as the progenitor of modern international law.

[iii] Johan de Witt (1625-1672) was the Grand Pensionary of Holland for much of the mid-seventeenth century, with a power base in the merchant class. He was largely opposed by the Orangist monarchists. According to an early biography, Spinoza was greatly disturbed by de Witt's murder by a mob in 1672, and had to be restrained from erecting a sign which read "*ultimi barbarorum*." It is debated whether he did in fact receive private economic support from de Witt as Strauss claims.

[iv] Sir William Petty (1623-1687) was a prominent scientist, economist, and politician both under Cromwell and after the Restoration.

prosperity they said: Well, yes.[v] You know, Holland played an enormous role in this age; it was a leading country. And the stock exchange in Amsterdam is a kind of incarnation of what was happening in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as I cannot now show. One has to study Montesquieu to see what this meant. For the first time a suprapolitical power, a power to which kings had to bow, which had no real political status—mere money, the loans—that changed everything. We will come to that question. Spinoza has some allusions to this question of the connection between tolerance and wealth. The argument could theologically be expressed as follows: God's law is meant to be beneficent to man; but if tolerance uses wealth, and wealth is beneficial, God wants tolerance. And then you could find biblical passages afterwards to support you.

Student: The problem still remains for me that in the first level of Spinoza's attack on religious authority, he attacks apparently the field of theology.

LS: Sure.

Student: Now which theology?

LS: I would say, taking the circumstances, the Calvinist, but also the Catholics, naturally. But you see, the point was this. Since the severe Calvinists were primarily engaged in a fight against the Catholics, there was a possibility for leeway of anti-Catholic literature, even if it was not Calvinistically inspired. One finds interesting documents of this kind apart from Spinoza. But you can say the orthodox Christian position and of course, although that was of no practical importance, the orthodox Jewish position. And he appealed to a certain kind of sect with whom he[15] [had relations] as a human being, the Mennonites. He lived with the Mennonites, [16]who at that time were very extreme men, those who put the emphasis on charity and were unconcerned with dogma. With these kinds of sects, then, Spinoza could have a working agreement, but of course only a working agreement. The theoretical bases were entirely different. And the ordinary reader will be deceived. For example, quite a few innocent people among these sects would be perfectly satisfied by the assertion [that] the Bible demands charity above everything else, and what you think dogmatically is of no importance. That made some sense to them. It was an extreme position which Spinoza took. To repeat, Hobbes himself said [that] he had not dared to write as boldly. Yet it was not so extreme as stated in the Holland of his time, as not to be printable. All kinds of things happened. I think it was burned in some Dutch states; I have forgotten now all the details. It was of course persecuted, and an enormous literature, about eighty pieces (I am speaking from memory) were written within five years against it. Naturally Spinoza was regarded as a kind of devil, a renegade Jew allied with this devil Johan de Witt. This was the language which was used, and that played a great role. Is this sufficient for the present? Good.

Let us turn only [as] a reminder to the first chapter. The first chapter deals with prophecy, but that means revelation, and the point which Spinoza makes, with some reticence, in the first chapter is that revelation is inseparable from imagination. He hardly goes beyond that. Only at the end of the first chapter he uses the expression "only through imagination"—you know, where he excludes the intellectual element. And then in the second chapter he divulges that openly: the

[v] It is possible that a word or phrase is missing here.

intellectual element was negligible in the prophets; it was almost completely imaginative. From this it follows (and this you stated very well in your paper, right in the beginning) the great power of [the] imagination and the great power of the intellect are mutually exclusive, one can say, so that people who are particularly imaginative are particularly poor, say, as theoretical thinkers. Therefore he goes on to say [that] the Bible does not contain any theoretical truth. Now let us first read that. That is on page 27 in the English translation, in the second paragraph.

Reader:

> Thus to suppose that knowledge of natural and spiritual phenomena can be gained from the prophetic books, is an utter mistake, which I shall endeavor to expose, as I think philosophy, the age, and the question itself demand.

LS: What does he say before "philosophy"? Since what demands it?

Student: Philosophy, the age, and the question itself.

LS: Why does he change the order? The time, philosophy, and finally the matter itself demands it. Yes?

Reader:

> I care not for the girdings of superstition, for superstition is the bitter enemy of all true knowledge and true morality. Yes; it has come to this! Men who openly confess that they can form no idea of God, and only know Him through created things, of which they know not the causes, can unblushingly accuse philosophers of Atheism. (*TPT*, chap. 2)

LS: Let us stop here for one moment. You see here what he says. The Bible, or at least the books of the prophets—but that means surely the Old Testament and by implication also the New Testament—the Bible contains no knowledge of natural and spiritual things. So natural things—one could conceivably say that the Bible was not written in order to inform us about meteorology or mineralogy; but spiritual things: the Bible does not convey any knowledge of spiritual things. That is the decisive point. There is no biblical theology to speak of. Yes. And then he says he will show that.[17] This assertion is the height of impiety according to the ordinary view, to which Spinoza replies here: No, you are the impious ones. You say that you have no idea of God in yourselves, and that one can know God only through the creatures, by ascending from the creatures to their causes. And you theologians do not possess any knowledge of such causes; therefore you have no knowledge of God at all. We philosophers, whom you accuse of atheism, are the only ones who possess true knowledge of God. Now do you recognize some historical phenomenon, some background, in this statement?

Student: Socrates.

LS: That is clear, that is the general problem. But here, a specific formulation: the idea of God in Descartes.[18] Descartes was a great innovator against the scholastic tradition, and the principle of this innovation is the notion of the idea of God. What does this mean, the "idea of God," the practical meaning of that in contrast to scholasticism? Well, the demonstrations of the existence

of God in the scholastic tradition[19] started from the visible things and ascended to the causes, and the most famous of these proofs was the Aristotelian proof of the first unmoved mover: you start from motion as we see it and ascend to a first unmoved mover. Descartes turns this around. We know we have a direct knowledge of God by possessing an innate idea of God, and we can prove the existence of God merely by looking at this idea of God. That is Descartes's so-called ontological proof, which has earlier precedents but which was generally rejected as a legitimate proof. So you see, Spinoza says: We pupils of Descartes, we are the truly pious men. We have genuine knowledge of God. We do not need any external authority because we have the innate idea of God, and we can prove the existence of God without that. The implication of Descartes, which is very great, is that nature as Descartes conceives of it does not lead to a demonstration of the existence of God. Nature is a self-contained system which does not lead to a God. In other words, in the medieval view you had a teleological natural science which led up to God. Here you have a mechanical science which leads [in] no way to God. And therefore, if you want to have a teleology you must have an entirely different basis. That was Descartes's idea of God. A generation after Descartes, Pascal says [that] nature conceals God, which means we cannot arrive at any knowledge of God by starting from nature; and when later on Hume and Kant denied any possibility of a demonstration of the existence of God, this was in a way implied in the Cartesian change, but only implied.

Spinoza then goes on to say prophecy is entirely imaginative, and imagination is unsafe and uncertain. Therefore, in order to be sure of the truth of what one imagines, one needs something external to the imagined thing—a sign, a miracle—and therefore prophetic knowledge, as he now openly says, is inferior to natural knowledge. Natural knowledge does not need external signs; it is evident in itself. Prophetic knowledge is not self-sufficient. In other words, the prophets did not possess mathematical certainty, which means theoretical certainty, but only moral certainty. Now that is an old expression, going back to Aristotle. Moral certainty is primarily the certainty we have on the basis of the character of the speaker. For example, if someone says he did not commit the crime, I may have no further proof of it except his assertion. But if I know the man very well, his character gives me a certainty. That is the primary meaning of moral certainty, certainty regarding the character. But later on it was taken in a somewhat wider sense, as when here it means what Spinoza is saying: we can be certain of the truth of the prophets only with a view to [the] characters of the prophets, that they were honest men. But honesty cannot prove theoretical truth. It can only prove that what they say about human conduct or action is honest. And that is what Spinoza says. In theological language, which Spinoza uses here, prophecy depended on the piety of the prophets, on their moral virtue, not on their intellectual virtue. This however raises great problems, as I have indicated and as we will see later. Now let us turn to page 30, paragraph 3.

Reader:

> Lastly, prophecy varied according to the opinions held by the prophets; for instance, to the Magi, who believed in the follies of astrology, the birth of Christ was revealed through the vision of a star in the East. To the augurs of Nebuchadnezzar the destruction of Jerusalem was revealed through entrails, whereas the king himself inferred it from oracles and the direction of arrows which he shot into the air. To prophets who believed that man acts from free

> choice and by his own power, God was revealed as standing apart from and ignorant of future human actions. All of which we will illustrate from Scripture.
>
> The first point is proved from the case of Elisha, who, in order to prophecy to Jehoram, asked for a harp, and was unable to perceive the Divine purpose till he had been recreated by its music; then, indeed he prophesied to Jehoram and to his allies glad tidings, which previously he had been unable to attain to because he was angry with the king, and those who are angry with anyone can imagine evil of him, but not good. The theory that God does not reveal Himself to the angry or the sad, is a mere dream: for God revealed to Moses, while angry, the terrible slaughter of the firstborn, and did so without the intervention of a harp. To Cain in his rage, God was revealed, and to Ezekiel, impatient with anger, was revealed to the contumacy and wretchedness of the Jews. Jeremiah, miserable and weary of life, prophesied the disasters of the Hebrews, so that Josiah would not consult him, but inquired of a woman, inasmuch as it was more in accordance with womanly nature that God should reveal His mercy thereto. So, Micaiah never prophesied good to Ahab, though other true prophets had done so, but invariably evil. Thus we see that individual prophets were by temperament more fitted for one sort of revelation than another. (*TPT*, chap. 2)

LS: We can skip the details. Now the main point is: what the prophets saw in their vision or heard in their auditions was merely what they imagined in accordance with their temperaments. A complete psychological explanation of prophecy; that is the great implication. And then he refers also to the different styles of the prophets. In other words, the word of God, the Bible, is written in different styles. These styles correspond to the circumstances of life of the different speakers. To summarize: it is possible to give an account of the Bible in purely human terms, to understand the Bible as a purely human production. And that settles the issue already, because infinite consequences follow from that: the Bible has no authority. The decisive point, if we turn to page 33 top.

Reader:

> But I will show in greater detail and length, for I consider the point more important, that the prophecies varied according to the opinions previously embraced by the prophets, and that the prophets held diverse and even contrary opinions and prejudices. (I speak, be it understood, solely of matters speculative, for in regard to uprightness and morality the case is widely different.) From thence I shall conclude that prophecy never rendered the prophets more learned, but left them with their former opinions, and that we are, therefore, not at all bound to trust them in matters of intellect. (*TPT*, chap. 2)

LS: In other words, all opinions expressed by the prophets are simply relics of opinions acquired in a natural way prior to that. There is no divine revelation in that. Now let us read the immediate sequel.

Reader:

> Everyone has been strangely hasty in affirming that the prophets knew everything within the scope of human intellect; and, although certain passages of Scripture plainly affirm that the prophets were in certain respects ignorant, such persons would rather say that they do not understand the passages than admit that there was anything which the prophets did not know; or else they try to wrest the Scriptural words away from their evident meaning.
>
> If either of these proceedings is allowable we may as well shut our Bibles, for vainly shall we attempt to prove anything from them if their plainest passages may be classed among obscure and impenetrable mysteries, or if we may put any interpretation on them which we fancy. For instance, nothing is more clear in the Bible than that Joshua, and perhaps also the author who wrote his history, thought that the sun revolves round the earth, and that the earth is fixed, and further that the sun for a certain period remained still. Many, who will not admit any movement in the heavenly bodies, explain away the passage till it seems to mean something quite different; others, who have learned to philosophize more correctly, and understand that the earth moves while the sun is still, or at any rate does not revolve round the earth, try with all their might to wrest this meaning from Scripture, though plainly nothing of the sort is intended. Such quibblers excite my wonder! (*TPT*, chap. 2)

LS: Now let us stop here. That is a great problem. That is not a simple problem from any point of view, the relation of Bible and science, as it is called. You see, in the middle ages the situation was fairly simple because you had a reasonably static scientific doctrine, the Aristotelian doctrine. And then you had the Bible; and once you could show by some reading [that] one could find the Aristotelian cosmology in the Bible, that settled it. In modern life, it has become much more difficult because of the changing character in science. Spinoza anticipated that already, as we shall see when he speaks later on explicitly about the interpretation of the Bible. It would theoretically mean that with every considerable change in natural science—say, for example, the emergence of nuclear physics, you would have to find allusions to nuclear physics in the Bible. And this fact has I think dealt the death blow to these attempts, although I know some very old-fashioned people who still try to find the most recent scientific discoveries in the Bible. As a whole, this has disappeared. It is no longer regarded as a serious problem. It is of some importance nevertheless, although this solution is primitive. What is the present-day view of the Catholic Church on this subject?

Student: What you said: the attempt to look for nuclear physics in the Bible has proved a foolish enterprise.

LS: That's clear. But there was of course—for example, at the time of Copernicus it was still used as an article against Copernicus that from the biblical point of view, the earth is at rest. And even[20] [since then] that [has] still played a role. But for Spinoza's argument these points are of the utmost importance. There are only a few more passages in the second chapter which we have to consider. Page 38, fourth paragraph.

Reader:

> The Israelites knew scarcely anything of God, although He was revealed to them; and this is abundantly evident from their transferring, a few days afterwards, the honor and worship due to Him to a calf, which they believed to be the god who had brought them out of Egypt. In truth, it is hardly likely that men accustomed to the superstitions of Egypt, uncultivated and sunk in most abject slavery, should have held any sound notions about the Deity, or that Moses should have taught them anything beyond a rule of right living; inculcating it not like a philosopher, as the result of freedom, but like a lawgiver compelling them to be moral by legal authority. Thus the rule of right living, the worship and love of God, was to them rather a bondage than the true liberty, the gift and grace of the Deity. Moses bid them love God and keep His law, because they had in the past received benefits from Him (such as the deliverance from slavery in Egypt), and further terrified them with threats if they transgressed His commands, holding out many promises of good if they should observe them; thus treating them as parents treat irrational children. It is, therefore, certain that they knew not the excellence of virtue and the true happiness. (*TPT*, chap. 2)

LS: Let us stop here. This already shows you the difficulty in which Spinoza will get when he asserts [that] while the Bible lacks completely theoretical truth, it contains the perfect moral truth. He speaks here of course only of the Jewish people, not of the prophets. But still it creates the difficulty: How could the elite of such a people, the prophets, have the true notions of man's perfection and virtue? Well, the complete break with the biblical religion is I think obvious, and as he makes clear, the low moral level of the Old Testament is implied in this.

Spinoza limits himself here in this chapter in the main to the Old Testament. Well, there were of course certain Christian sects who tried to get rid of the Old Testament and only keep the New Testament. The most famous sect at that time was the Socinians, I believe, who tried to do that. Spinoza partly followed that line. But he makes[21] [himself] clear at the end of this chapter in the following way. The Apostles and evangelists adapted themselves to the prejudices of their contemporaries; hence the New Testament also does not give you the pure truth. For example, if there is a reference made in the New Testament to demons—now, why is that made? Because the Jews at that time and the pagans believed in demons. That doesn't mean that the New Testament underwrites the belief in demons and other things. So there remains practically nothing of the authority of the New Testament as well.

Now, as for the third chapter, to which we return now. Let us first read the heading.

Reader:

> Of the Vocation of the Hebrews, and Whether the Gift of Prophecy Was Peculiar to Them.

LS: Why does he take up this subject here? He makes it clear at the end of the preceding chapter that it does not strictly belong to the purpose of the book. Why does he take it up nevertheless? He had spoken about prophets and prophecy in the preceding chapters. Here the theme is, among other things, whether the prophetic gift was peculiar to the Hebrews. Well, what he suggested in fact in the first two chapters is that prophecy is a natural phenomenon, not a supranatural

phenomenon. Now if this is so, if it is a natural phenomenon, it should be a universal phenomenon. It should be found among all peoples. According to the traditional view, prophets existed only or almost only among the Jews. Hence he must take that first, and for this purpose he discusses the election of Israel,[22] not for its own sake, but in order to show that prophecy is a universal phenomenon.[23] That was his chief question, prophecy and its seeming peculiarity. What is the conclusion which he reaches?[24]

Student: Well, prophecy is an international phenomenon.

LS: Universal.

Student: Universal. Based on a natural moral law which is available to all men; not strictly Jewish.

LS: But still, is not "prophet" a translation of a Hebrew word? Where do you find such figures like Isaiah or Jeremiah among the other nations? What does he say?

Student: Well, they call them . . .

LS: Soothsayers. In other words, the soothsayers and oracles of the pagans are exactly the same thing as the prophets. That is a difficult assertion from every point of view.

Student: He backs it up by saying that just as the prophets were good men in themselves . . .

LS: But still, [even] if one grants Spinoza almost everything, this creates from a purely historical point of view a difficulty. If you read something about the augurs, say, in Cicero or in other places and compare it with the prophets of the Old Testament, there is a certain difference in the level. That is a problem Spinoza never really solved. In order to answer the question whether prophecy is peculiar to the Jews or can be peculiar to a nation, he raises the general question: What can be peculiar to a nation? But before turning to that, he brings up the question regarding the belief in election, chosenness, of a people. And Spinoza's answer is this: Belief in election is based on the desire to be superior—fundamentally what Toynbee says, I think, today.[vi] The Jews believed in their election because they wanted to be superior, and that was it. That creates a certain difficulty, because Spinoza believes in the superiority of the philosophers to the vulgar. Can this also be traced to such pride? Spinoza would say: Well, that's a fact, their superiority. But from the biblical point of view, the election is of course also a fact, and even an undeserved fact. Spinoza is theologically always very crude, and in this particular case too. Now what is the peculiarity of the Hebrews? That is the question. He turns to that on page 44, paragraph 4. He gives a sketch of his theology, but in a very provisional way. We read perhaps the beginning of that.

Reader:

[vi] Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) was a prominent British historian, best known for *A Study of History*, which notoriously referred to Judaism as a fossil religion.

> But before I begin, I wish in a few words to explain what I mean by the guidance of God, by the help of God, external and inward, and, lastly, what I understand by fortune.
>
> By the help of God, I mean the fixed and unchangeable order of nature or the chain of natural events: for I have said before and shown elsewhere that the universal laws of nature, according to which all things exist and are determined, are only another name for the eternal decrees of God, which always involve eternal truth and necessity.
>
> So that to say that everything happens according to natural laws, and to say that everything is ordained by the decree and ordinance of God, is the same thing. Now since the power in nature is identical with the power of God, by which alone all things happen and are determined, it follows that whatsoever man, as a part of nature, provides himself with to aid and preserve his existence, or whatsoever nature affords to him without his help, is given to him solely by the Divine power, acting either through human nature or through external circumstances. So whatever human nature can furnish itself with by its own efforts to preserve its existence, may be fitly called the inward aid of God, whereas whatever else accrues to man's profit from outward causes may be called the external aid of God. (*TPT*, chap. 3)

LS: We can leave it at that. In other words, Spinoza really redefines theological concepts so as to acquire an entirely new meaning. It is, as stated here, a mere assertion. But he makes here a little note[25]: "As we have shown in another place." In other words, that is not a proof. That is a mere assertion. What is that other place?

Student: The *Ethics*.

LS: The *Ethics*, which was not published at that time, of course. That was written in 1670, and then it was published after Spinoza's death in 1677.[vii] So these are then mere assertions. And you see that the *Theologico-Political Treatise* depends ultimately on the *Ethics*, as far as its claim to reason is concerned. Nevertheless, Spinoza thinks the argument of the *Treatise* is to a considerable extent self-supporting, otherwise it could not have been written.

Student: Is that the justification for his statement that prophets do give moral certitude, or that the teachings of the prophets are morally correct teachings? Because if he denied the justification of that statement by denying the authority of the Bible, the only other justification is a philosophic one.

LS: And what does this mean?

Student: And that would mean the justification would rest in the *Ethics*.

[vii] Spinoza worked on the *Ethics*, with interruptions, during an extended period from the 1650s to the end of his life in 1677.

LS: [26]In other words, the *Ethics* could perhaps show that perfect moral knowledge is possible independent of perfect speculative or theoretical knowledge. Is that what you mean?

Student: Yes. The prophets, he says, do give the correct moral teaching. Their sayings at least coincide with certain conceptions of what is the right way to live. And he says that[27] [that] shows a way of blessedness, but the way of blessedness is an intellectual achievement. Yet he denied that intellectual achievement to the prophets. My question was: Wherein is the justification of, or how does he explain the prophets' correct moral teaching?

LS: Well, I am willing to volunteer an answer to your question, but not on the basis of what we have read up to now. Spinoza does not believe that the prophets possess the true moral teaching. That is a sheer contradiction which gradually dissolves. To mention one simple but crucial example: the true moral teaching leads to the duty of unqualified obedience to the secular power. Yet the prophets repeatedly demand resistance to the vicious and irreligious kings. That shows it: they were teachers of rebellion, and they were not moral. There is more evidence of that. That is only a provisional [answer]—you see, Spinoza builds up an intermediary position, which is barely tolerable publicly, namely, the Bible is a wonderful book for moral edification but not for theoretical instruction. Ultimately it is not even good for moral edification on a deeper level. In a crude way, surely it is nice to preach against murder and theft; that is all right, but if you raise any questions which pertain to government, and tell governments to abstain from certain actions required for the preservation of the community, then Machiavelli is a better guide than Isaiah, of course, in Spinoza's point of view. That will come out.[28]

I thought you meant this question: How far [could] Spinoza[29] carry any conviction by a book the theoretical principles of which are in no way established in this book, but [rather] in another book which he had written more or less but which surely was not accessible to the public? And I think he would say that his arguments showing the self-contradictions in the Bible, the crude anthropomorphic notions of God and what have you, they are sufficient to destroy the theoretical authority of the Bible. And he sketches only a kind of background, [30][and he] admits that it is not substantiated by what occurs in this book. Partly he does this also by appealing to certain formulae, as we shall see later, which had a certain theological plausibility. For example, when he says, as we shall see in chapter 6 already, that the intellect of God is identical with the will of God, well, rightly interpreted this could be accepted by an orthodox theologian. Rightly interpreted. But Spinoza takes it absolutely literally, and then he draws terrific consequences from that which are incompatible with any orthodox theology. He prepares the public as it were for his *Ethics*—I mean, the part of the public which he believes can be converted. You wanted to say something?

Student: Is it not possible that the *Ethics*, a part of the *Ethics*, some of the ideas contained in the *Ethics*, were in circulation among that public?

LS: Yes. That could only have been a very small part, surely. No, that is clear; some people had read the manuscript. For example, we know in the case of Leibniz, who visited Spinoza, and Spinoza showed him the manuscripts, complete manuscripts. Is this not so? And I suppose Leibniz read a bit of it.[viii]

[viii] Contemporary scholarship indicates that Spinoza showed Leibniz only limited portions of the *Ethics*.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: At any rate, around Spinoza there was a circle, but they were only a very small part of the public and not to be identified with the addressees of this book. In other words, what Spinoza says here is this, in this passage which we read: there is election in the sense of the guidance of course, a part of divine providence, and what Spinoza says here is [that] providence is identical with the natural order. And therefore we must understand any possible election as a natural phenomenon, [as] something which could be called election but is not precisely understood as election. In other words, we can call a people elected if they were particularly fortunate, and we can call them reprobates if they are particularly unfortunate. That is all it can mean from Spinoza's point of view. Now the next point comes somewhat closer to the political in the narrower sense. That is on page 45, third paragraph.

Reader:

> All objects of legitimate desire fall, generally speaking, under one of these three categories:
>
> 1. The knowledge of things through their primary causes.
> 2. The government of the passions, or the acquirement of the habit of virtue.
> 3. Secure and healthy life. (*TPT*, chap. 3)

LS: Let us stop here for one moment. [Of] these three ends, as he will make clear in the sequel, politics proper has to do only with the third, to live securely and with a healthy body. Self-preservation. Does anything strike you regarding these three ends: theoretical perfection, moral perfection, and bodily equal to political perfection? Yes?

Student: This seems to be largely Aristotelian in formulation.

LS: In a way. That is a very good point. But precisely by looking at Aristotle we will find a subtle difference. Is for[31] [Aristotle] the habit of virtue identical with the taming of the passions?[32]

Student: No.

LS: No. Why not?[33]

Student: Aristotle I think goes beyond that.

LS: Yes, but what is the crucial exception in Aristotle? You can say that what Spinoza says of all virtues with the exception of one, which is not primarily concerned with the passions, but with operations or actions.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: No. Justice. Justice is concerned not with the passions, with the control of the passions, but with doing the just thing. What Spinoza implies is [that] if you look back to Aristotle, justice is not a primary virtue. As he states it in other places: justice is radically dependent on positive law. In the state of nature there cannot be justice. We will come to that. That is an important deviation. But that would not appear immediately; one has to think about that. And of course the other point is striking: the task of politics is identified with life and health, and not also with virtue, the promotion of virtue. That is also a clear deviation not only from Aristotle but from the whole classical tradition.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: Where is that in the translation?

Student: On page 45: "so whatever human nature can furnish itself with by its own efforts to preserve its existence, may be fitly called the inward aid of God, whereas whatever else accrues to man's profit from outward causes may be called the external aid of God."

LS: Here there is a certain ambiguity which we will take up later, that Spinoza, while starting from the Hobbean formula, self-preservation, gives it a different meaning. So that self-preservation really means—the relation of self-preservation to time is completely denied by Spinoza, whereas in Hobbes it has of course a relation to time. [For Hobbes], you want to live as long as possible, whereas Spinoza means rather by self-preservation the self-preservation of one's inner freedom, and the amount of time, i.e., the preservation of mere life, becomes uninteresting. That is deceptive, that point. But that is precisely the problem of Spinoza: How can he arrive at his morality, his relatively lofty morality, by starting from self-preservation as the premise? I can only state the problem now. We have to see what he says a bit later. Now the crucial point which he makes, then on page 46, the second half of the page—no, a bit later, the next sentence: "Nations."

Reader:

> Nations then, are distinguished from one another in respect to the social organization and the laws under which they live and are governed—

LS: In other words, the main point is this. Nations cannot be distinguished from one another by intellectual or moral perfection proper, because this belongs to man, i.e., every individual's natural equipment, and therefore is in principle equally available in fact everywhere. What[34] can distinguish one society or, as Spinoza says, one nation, from the other is only its laws, its political organization, and the consequences of the same. This is of course a difficult and strange assertion on various grounds. For example, why could there not be differences of natural gifts among different nations? I mean, you cannot dispose of this problem by merely denying it. Or cannot the laws be directed toward man's theoretical and moral perfection? These things are denied by Spinoza without any reason given here. Well, Spinoza would perhaps[35] make this remark: I am not now concerned with these general questions; I am only concerned with the question whether the Hebrews were intellectually or morally superior, say, to the Greeks or other civilized nations, and there I do not find anything. And therefore the only meaning which the

word could possibly have would be a social or political superiority. And that of course he ultimately denies too, for example, if you read on a little bit later:

> in regard to the intellect it is an established fact, as we have shown in the preceding chapter, that the Hebrews have had only very vulgar notions about God and nature, hence with regard to the infinite they were not elected by God in preference to others, nor were they elected with regard to virtue and pure life, for in this respect they were also equal to the other nations, and only very few of them were chosen. (*TPT*, chap. 3)

In other words, the other thing which comes in is this. A nation as nation, consisting mostly of vulgar people and only of a very small elite, cannot be intellectually and morally superior. That is necessarily the preserve of a small minority. As for the question[36] [which] Spinoza seems to deny here, that laws can be directed toward theoretical and moral perfection—I mean, for example, in Plato we have a clear case of laws, a social order, directed toward a theoretical and moral perfection. In Aristotle we have certainly a clear case of laws or social orders directed towards moral perfection. The common practice up to Spinoza's time was that the political or social order is directed toward the moral perfection—to the highest good, for example—was taken for granted. Spinoza tries to separate politics from morality to assign to politics a much lower end, to make it self-contained from this point of view. Will you turn to page 56, line 4 to 5 from the bottom. That seems to be of some importance.

Reader:

> Lastly, if any one wishes to maintain that the Jews, from this or from any other cause, have been chosen by God for ever, I will not gainsay him if he will admit that this choice, whether temporary or eternal, has no regard, in so far as it is peculiar to the Jews, to aught but dominion and physical advantages (for by such alone can one nation be distinguished from another), whereas in regard to intellect and true virtue, every nation is on a par with the rest, and God has not in these respects chosen one people rather than another. (*TPT*, chap. 3)

LS: That is only a clear repetition of this point. Nations as nations can be distinguished from each other only by political or economic differences, not by moral and intellectual ones. The deeper reason—what Spinoza means, I think is this: that moral and intellectual superiority is a rare phenomenon in any nation, and therefore no nation as a nation, including the vulgar as well as the educated, can be superior to any other nation from this point of view. It is a very narrow view of the situation.

On page 47[37] he speaks of the end of society, "the end of society in general—of government—is[38] to live securely and comfortably." Securely and comfortably, that's all. The relation to virtue is not intended. That is the view which Hobbes and Locke also maintained at the same time but, as I say, Spinoza tries to graft on this a loftier notion of society, and we must see how he goes about that. There are a few more passages which we should consider. On page 49 bottom. That is paragraph 31 in the Bruder edition.

Reader:

> As it is a fact that God is equally gracious, merciful, and the rest, to all men; and as the function of the prophet was to teach men not so much the laws of their country, as true virtue, and to exhort them thereto, it is not to be doubted that all nations possessed prophets, and that the prophetic gift was not peculiar to the Jews. Indeed, history, both profane and sacred, bears witness to the fact. Although, from the sacred histories of the Old Testament, it is not evident that the other nations had as many prophets as the Hebrews, or that any Gentile prophet was expressly sent by God to the nations, this does not affect the question, for the Hebrews were careful to record their own affairs, not those of other nations. (*TPT*, chap. 3)

LS: And then he gives examples of Old Testament references to prophets who were not Jews, and especially Balaam plays a very great role in this respect. Here you see another reference to the moral function of the prophets: moral perfection, not intellectual;[39] but this morality is a universal morality and therefore cannot be peculiar to the Jews. This is somewhat more developed, page 53, center.

Reader:

> Further, in chap. iv. verse 9, he says that all alike, Jew and Gentile, were under sin, and that without commandment and law there is no sin. Wherefore it is most evident that to all men absolutely was revealed the law under which all lived—namely, the law which has regard only to true virtue, not the law established in respect to, and in the formation of, a particular state and adapted to the disposition of a particular people. Lastly, Paul concludes that since God is the God of all nations, that is, is equally gracious to all, and since all men equally live under the law and under sin, so also to all nations did God send His Christ, to free all men equally from the bondage of the law, that they should no more do right by the command of the law, but by the constant determination of their hearts. (*TPT*, chap. 3)

LS: And so on. You see here he refers to a law of an entirely different kind from the political law, namely, the law which teaches true virtue. But that is the subject of the following chapter, where he speaks of the divine law. But here is already a qualification. Must not, he suggests, according to the meaning of the Pauline doctrine this law too be transcended, because grace liberates from the servitude of the law? That we will take up later. At the end he gives a natural explanation of the survival of the Jewish people. According to the traditional view, both Jewish and Christian, the survival of the Jewish people was due to peculiar Providence. It seems to run counter to all natural explanations that a people survived without a state. Now Spinoza must give a natural explanation; and he gives that in the rest of the chapter, and there is one remark here which is of a more general importance. He says—well, he explains [that] the Jewish rites separating the Jews from the Gentiles guaranteed by themselves the survival. And as an example he uses the pigtail of the Chinese.[ix] So that is a merely natural phenomenon, [40] [that] the Jewish people established a state, lost the state, and survived the loss of that state in a purely natural way. There is only one difficulty in Spinoza's terms, and this again is purely natural: the effeminacy of their religion—or what is the more precise expression which he uses? Yes, the

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[ix] See *TPT*, chap. 3, page 56 in the Elwes translation.

foundations of their religion effeminates their mind, and if they do not overcome that effeminacy, they will not re-establish the Jewish state. Now what does this mean? What can he mean by that, effeminacy of mind due to the principles of the Jewish religion? Does it remind you of an issue raised before Spinoza?

Student: In Machiavelli.

LS: Only Machiavelli spoke chiefly of Christianity. In other words, the religion, biblical religion, not pagan religion, leads to effeminacy. What does that mean? After all, the courage and patience of martyrs was unsurpassed by anything pagan. What does that mean? Yes?

Student: I think he refers to political things: empire, rule and wealth.

LS: Were there not Christian empires?

Student: Wasn't the issue Christianity in general referred to other-worldly[41] direction?

LS: Sure, that's clear. But that would explain the accusation of other-worldliness and contempt for this world, but not effeminacy.

Student: Charity to the weak, and things like this.

LS: Well, [of course] the New Testament[42] teaching against resisting evil. And I think probably in Judaism what Spinoza has in mind was the practical abolition of capital punishment in the Jewish religion, which in Spinoza's eyes of course would show an effeminate mind—you know, people are unwilling to kill. Now those are the main points which come up in these first three chapters. By the end of the three chapters it is clear that Spinoza denies all authority to the Bible. But we must make a distinction. What would the ordinary reader who has no theological sophistication whatever, what would he find?[43] We make this distinction, and even to him it is clear that Spinoza denies any speculative truth to the Bible. You cannot learn anything from the Bible regarding God's true nature, but the Bible teaches the right kind of morality. But—that is to be added immediately—that of course is done also by all pagan writers. I mean, if a Roman augur or soothsayer has the same morality fundamentally as the biblical prophets had, then surely Cicero, who also was an augur, transmitted it in his moral writings. So the Bible has no claim to any particular consideration except as a convenient book of moral education for the multitude. You know, infinite consequences follow from that. How can one expect that any organization, the church or what have you, based on the Bible have any political claim? The autonomy of the state is already implied here, although we do not yet know what the state is, and its function. He says that we know already, but that is not proven; [it] is a mere assertion that the function of civil society is to make possible a secure and comfortable life and that it has no essential relation to men's moral perfection, to say nothing of intellectual perfection. This much is, I believe, clear from the beginning.

But Spinoza has to take up, of course, the question of the status of morality and its relation to the society.[44] First the question of the status of morality, and that is traditionally stated: Is there a natural law, a law ordering man toward his perfection, a law grounded in his nature? Spinoza

takes this question up in the next chapter under the title "the divine law."[45] [Although] the divine law[46] according to [the] traditional view[47] is something different from the natural law, they were somehow thought to be akin, and we must see why Spinoza chooses the name "the divine law." That is probably due to the preponderance of [references to] the Jewish tradition[48] in this part of the work, but they are practically the same. For the better understanding of the beginning of this chapter—the definition of law—it is helpful if[49] you would look at Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* and see the general definition of law given there.[x] As you see, Spinoza begins with a general definition of law,[50] [but] see how he deviates from the traditional definition.[51]

Student: You gave some historical background earlier. I was wondering if you would recommend some material for historical background of the times and Spinoza.

LS: Yes. A biography, a deep biography of Spinoza was written by a German Jesuit—a German Jesuit [but] really a Pole.[xi] But these are four fat volumes. There is an earlier biography, much earlier, which is also in German, by Freudenthal which was very good.[xii] I believe that appeared in 1903 or 1904 and was very good at the time, but in the meantime he began to discover lots of additional evidence, not terribly important. But you see, when Spinoza was discovered in 1785 in Germany, he was made a kind of saint. I don't know whether you knew that. And that had a very important meaning for the social and cultural history of the West, because a new kind of church emerged, one can say, the church of the cultivated, cultured, sovereign mind not subject to any spiritual authority. And Spinoza was somehow a kind of church father. Therefore, [keep this in mind] when you read what these people say, like Hegel, one of the greatest men, but [also] some others: the god-intoxicated philosopher, that was how he was called by one of them.[xiii] And that meant[52] [that his] is a much higher and loftier and piety than that of the churches. The fact that Spinoza himself was not a Christian nor a Jew seemed to point to this new liberal society where all men are truly emancipated, truly cultured.

Now a part of this story was a glorification of Spinoza's character beyond all recognition. He was no longer a human, a reasonably decent human being. He was much more. A great part was played by the fact that he was very poor. Poverty seems to be a recommendation. Well, there are some external facts which are impressive, but not overwhelming. For example, although he was not a Christian, he was offered a professorship in Heidelberg by the German Elector. And Spinoza being a reasonable man declined, because he knew he would get into infinite troubles with the theologians immediately, but that was interpreted as a sign of unusual self-denial and humility. And regarding these facts, quite a few have come out. For example, he was poor and lived as a grinder of lenses, but in the meantime,[53] [and] that [was] already well known, he got a pension—a small one, not big Rockefeller affair but sufficient for an unmarried man of small

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[x] Richard Hooker (1554-1600) was an influential English theologian.

[xi] Strauss is presumably referring to the four-volume work *Spinoza* (1933-1936) by Stanislaus von Dunin-Borkowski.

[xii] J. Freudenthal, *Spinoza, sein Leben und sein Lehre* (1904).

[xiii] The phrase is usually first attributed to the German poet Novalis.

needs—from Johan de Witt.[xiv] And then it seems in his youth [that] he and a relative of his had certain dealings at the Amsterdam stock exchange. That I think they found out. But whoever likes such curiosities will be interested in the more recent literature[54] in which many of these things are mentioned. But I think for most purposes Freudenthal's one-volume book would be sufficient. But that is the most recent biography. I have not read a popular biography which came out in this country by a man called Feuer.[xv] I haven't read that, but perhaps it is good. I can't say either that it is good or bad or in between, not having read it. But you are more concerned with the intellectual background, the sects and the other movements. In this respect I think [the four fat volumes][xvi] [55][are] amazingly complete.

Student: Is there something in English?

LS: I do not know. I really do not know whether one can speak of *the* English Spinoza biography. But there is no question there is nothing comparable to [Dunin-Borkowski's] book.[xvii] It was quoted once by no less a man than Mussolini in the Italian Senate, when Mussolini made the concordat with the church, and there was opposition on the part of the liberals. And Mussolini said: Well, you are fighting a battle of the seventeenth century again; the Catholic Church has changed completely. *The* book on Spinoza has been written by a Jesuit. So you see, it entered the political debate.[56] I think as far as biography goes that[57] there are many studies on Spinoza. I forget now, but they deal chiefly with his metaphysics. There is a book on Spinoza's[58] political philosophy by Duff, which appeared I think in 1903,[xviii] but I simply do not remember. There is a Dutch book which is probably—yes, that is probably translated into English—which was the first of its kind, by a Dutchman called Meinsma, *Spinoza and His Circle*, I believe it is called, which also deals with various such sects of the time and gives this kind of background. [xix] I do not know of any English work. I wonder whether Spinoza played such a great role in England as he played on the continent. I know Thomas Arnot, the man from Dublin, wrote an essay on Spinoza, "The Spirit of the German Idealistic Movement."[xx] That I remember having read, but I don't know any biographies. I may be mistaken. I was reasonably informed about that some decades ago, but I lost contact with that. I think if something very striking would have happened I would have heard of it and would have read it. But I do not think that has happened. As I say, this half-religious literature—you know, Spinoza as the founder of the new church of modernity, this still goes on to some extent and from time to time I see traces of it, but I don't believe this is as informative. I think if you take a general church history of Holland at that time—I wouldn't know which it would be—the best there would probably be advisable. Mr. ___?

[xiv] This claim, alleged by the early and sympathetic biographer Lucas, is disputed in contemporary scholarship. See, for example, Steven Nadler's biography, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 259

[xv] Lewis Samuel Feuer, *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958).

[xvi] Brackets in original transcript.

[xvii] Stanislaus von Dunin-Borkowski, *Aus den Tagen Spinozas*, 3 bd. (Münster: Aschendorff, 1933).

[xviii] Robert Duff, *Spinoza's Political and Ethical Philosophy* (1903).

[xix] K. O. Meinsma, *Spinoza en zijn kring* (1896). Available in a revised French edition as *Spinoza et son cercle* (1983). The book has not been translated into English.

[xx] The reference could not be identified by the editor. It is possible that Strauss meant Matthew Arnold, who wrote an essay on Spinoza.

Student: There is a book by Paul Hazard, *The Crisis of the European Moral Conscience*.[xxi]

LS: It has a very good reputation, yes. I have not yet come around to reading it but it is spoken of with respect by people who are not enthusiastic about everything in it. I cannot say more. People say it is an interesting book. I don't know. There is a kind of book dealing with the general spirit, and somehow I don't believe in this kind of thing, and that is the serious reason I didn't read it. But if I had an occasion I would read it. I have been accused again by someone that I do not—well, if I do not read the literature, as least I should quote it. I think it is really important if one . . . advice which I cannot give to young people with good conscience. But if one has a choice between reading the great books and the literature on the great books, I myself prefer to read the great books.[59] One may miss something, but the chances are that one misses less than the other way around. Well, when one is young one has no right to do that, I know that; but when one is reaching almost biblical age one cannot afford doing that. Of course the question of reading the literature and quoting it are two entirely different propositions. If you think only from the point of view of the expensive character of printing, you see that you have read quite a few things without ever speaking of that in print, but[60] it boosts the length of publications enormously if you can do it.

I am sorry I do not know Hazard. I think it is a serious book from what I have heard. The only way of understanding any serious book, it seems to me, is really to read it, if one can, in the original. Because translations are done in most cases with unbelievable lack of responsibility. They want to write what they understand by fluent English, which is sometimes not more fluent than would be a literal translation. We have seen some examples, and we will probably see more. So that is all I can say. But the broad facts about Spinoza are these things. As I say, this party alignment is very obvious: Calvinist ruler and a Calvinist populace versus latitudinarian, Arminian, patrician, commercial upper class. And Spinoza generally speaking [was] on the side of this upper class, whose greatest political representation at that time was Johan De Witt, the same type of people to whom Hugo Grotius belonged a generation before Spinoza—Hugo Grotius, the founder of international law.

Next time Mr. ____ will read his paper on chapters 4 to 5.

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[1] Moved "that the prophets of the Old Testament"
[2] Deleted "as"
[3] Deleted "And therefore also"
[4] Moved "say Confucian books or the Hindu books"
[5] Deleted "the"
[6] Deleted "there is still a survival of"
[7] Deleted "by speaking"
[8] Deleted "the judge"
[9] Deleted "if I have"
[10] Deleted "Spinoza"
[11] Deleted "in"
[12] Deleted "and"
[13] Deleted "they were"
[14] Deleted "that"

[xxi] Paul Hazard, *La Crise de la conscience européenne* (1935). Translated into English as *The European Mind: The Critical Years, 1680-1715* (1953).

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[15] Deleted "was related"
[16] Deleted "for example, you know, they play a role in this country"
[17] Deleted "In order to understand that sentence"
[18] Deleted "And"
[19] Deleted "the scholastic ones"
[20] Deleted "in between"
[21] Deleted "it"
[22] Deleted "but"
[23] Deleted "And what does he"
[24] Deleted "Can you repeat that?"
[25] Deleted "which you read"
[26] Deleted "I don't—but"
[27] Deleted "then"
[28] Deleted "But we must now"
[29] Deleted "could believe to"
[30] Deleted "of which"
[31] Deleted "Spinoza"
[32] Deleted "[Student:] Is for Spinoza, or is for Aristotle? [**LS**:] For Aristotle."
[33] Deleted "[Student:] I thought you said Spinoza. [**LS**:] For Spinoza yes, he says so; the taming of the passions. Quite a few people say that. But what about Aristotle?"
[34] Deleted "is not – what"
[35] Deleted "say"
[36] Deleted "what"
[37] Deleted "the center, where"
[38] Deleted "Do you have that? Is"
[39] Deleted "one"
[40] Deleted "And therefore, since it is a purely natural phenomenon that"
[41] Deleted "other worldly"
[42] Moved "of course"
[43] Deleted "But"
[44] Deleted "But"
[45] Deleted "Because"
[46] Deleted "while"
[47] Deleted "the divine law"
[48] Deleted "as far as Spinoza is concerned"
[49] Deleted "who is to read that chapter? Mr. _"
[50] Deleted "and"
[51] Deleted "The term – and then that is helpful. Now is there any other point you would like to bring up regarding today's assignment?"
[52] Deleted "it"
[53] Deleted "that is"
[54] Deleted "which is – there is a book called – an annual publication"
[55] Deleted "is"
[56] Deleted "No, I don't know of any particular"
[57] Moved "it"
[58] Deleted "on his"
[59] Deleted "But"
[60] Deleted "because"

Session 4: no date

Leo Strauss: [i]Here [in chapter 5] we really get a first sketch of his social or political doctrine. That is on page 73 in the third paragraph. He develops there (we can't read it; we must consider only the most important passages) [the point that] man by nature,[1] we can summarize, needs society for his life and for his good life; division of labor, the old story: things are better done if the various works are distributed among people of various gifts. But man does not need law and government to the same degree as he needs society. If men were reasonable, they would not need law and government. But they are not reasonable. Law and government is a concession to human irrationality.[2]

Reader:

> Therefore, no society can exist without government, and force, and laws to restrain and repress men's desires and immoderate impulses. Still human nature will not submit to absolute repression. Violent governments, as Seneca says, never last long; the moderate governments endure. So long as men act simply from fear they act contrary to their inclinations, taking no thought for the advantages or necessity of their actions, but simply endeavouring to escape punishment or loss of life. They must needs rejoice in any evil which befalls their ruler, even if it should involve themselves; and must long for and bring about such evil by every means in their power. Again, men are especially intolerant of serving and being ruled by their equals. Lastly, it is exceedingly difficult to revoke liberties once granted. (*TPT*, chap. 5)

LS: Now these are three premises which Spinoza will use in the sequel for giving a strictly human explanation of the ceremonial law. Now what are these points? Most men, not all, are unreasonable; therefore they must be compelled externally to behave. But three things: first, men resent compulsion. Second, they resent particularly compulsion on the part of their equals. The implication is [that] men regard themselves as equal[s], so if they are bossed around by some other yahoo then they don't like it. And the third point is[3] [that] this is especially difficult if they are accustomed to freedom. Now Spinoza first draws a theoretical, general conclusion from that before he applies it to the Old Testament. Now let us read the sequel.

Reader:

> From these considerations it follows, firstly, that authority should either be vested in the hands of the whole state in common, so that everyone should be bound to serve, and yet not be in subjection to his equals; or else, if power be in the hands of a few, or one man, that one man should be something above average humanity, or should strive to get himself accepted as such.

LS: "Or should try to persuade the vulgar." Yes.

Reader:

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[i] The first part of the session was evidently not recorded.

> Secondly, laws should in every government be so arranged that people should be kept in bounds by the hope of some greatly desired good, rather than by fear, for then everyone will do his duty willingly. Lastly, as obedience consists in acting at the bidding of external authority, it would have no place in a state where the government is vested in the whole people, and where laws are made by common consent. In such a society the people would remain free, whether the laws were added to or diminished, inasmuch as it would not be done on external authority, but their own free consent. The reverse happens when the sovereign power is vested in one man, for all act at his bidding; and, therefore, unless they had been trained from the first to depend on the words of their ruler, the latter would find it difficult, in case of need, to abrogate liberties once conceded, and impose new laws. (*TPT*, chap. 5)

LS: Let us stop here. The problem of government is this: Given the irrationality of most men, government, i.e., compulsion, is needed; but at the same time men withstand that compulsion. That seems to be an insoluble problem. Men must be compelled, and they cannot be compelled. What is the solution? There are two solutions suggested.

Student: Consent.

LS: What is that?

Student: The people consent to the compulsion or have some say.

LS: Spinoza is more precise. The first solution is this—people don't like to obey, and they should obey. One solution is the abolition of obedience. He says so: "Since obedience consists in this, that someone fulfills commands from the sole authority of the commander, it follows that obedience in that society where the government is with all, and the laws are sanctioned from the common consent, has no place." Obedience has no place in a democracy, because there the government is with all. There is no obedience. What does this mean?

Student: He means by that that everyone is living under their own control rather than under the control of an external authority. So the question of being compelled to do something by others doesn't arise.

LS: Sure. But is it not an absurd assertion, as everyone living in a democracy knows? Who does not obey in a democracy?

Student: Those who follow the law freely and willingly.

LS: But they are so few according to Spinoza, we can forget about them. But who does not obey in a democracy?

Student: The rulers themselves.

LS: Who are the rulers?

Student: The people collectively, the voters.

LS: No, not quite. The voters are also subjects. The sovereign people, the people as sovereign. The individuals obey, of course, like everyone else.[4] That is of course a very sophistical thing, and we must later on see what it means in fact. As stated, it is impossible. But what he states is surely this: the people do not obey in a democracy because they are the sovereign. In an aristocracy and in a monarchy, the people obey. So democracy is the solution to our problem. In democracy the people as people do not have to obey. Since Spinoza was not a complete fool, one must try to develop this a bit.

People don't want to be bossed around by their equals. In a democracy, where (according to the principle, at any rate) everyone counts as much as everyone else, he does as much bossing around as his boss. You see? This difficulty does not exist in democracy up to this level. That is the beginning of Spinoza's democratic argument. But let us not forget the premises. People regard themselves as equal. Does Spinoza teach that they are equal? No. So in other words, it is a kind of an irrational dislike of authority which is the basis, and one must see later on whether Spinoza cannot find more respectable grounds. In other words, it may be that democracy has a sound rationale which however is linked up with some irrational passions. That could be. And from Spinoza's point of view that would be excellent, because without the support of some irrational passions, men in general cannot live. What is the alternative to democracy? I mean, I don't want to hear monarchy or aristocracy, that goes without saying. But what is the principle of the alternative to democracy?

Student: Theocracy. You have to convince the people.

LS: What does this mean in plain English? Fraud. Democracy or fraud. Democracy has a certain irrational basis, this irrational belief in equality. But it does not necessarily contain fraud, whereas the alternative does.

By the way, the term self-government comes to mind when Spinoza speaks here of the abolition of obedience. When you speak of self-government, you imply of course [that] you do not obey someone else. Now that is true of the people. And the great question of course is: How can Spinoza clarify the relation of obedience of the individuals to the will of the people, with the sovereign will of the people? That was the problem later on of Rousseau, the same problem. And Rousseau found the classic formulation for that. The problem of government consists in the following situation. Men are by nature free, but by entering society they become unfree. Yet the only legitimate form of society, of political society, is where men remain as free as they were heretofore. Now if men living in a society, subject to laws and government, are still free—meaning subject only to their own will—then you cannot strictly speak of authority there. That leads to anarchism, of course (the anarchistic doctrines stem largely from there), but it leads also to a certain sophisticated modern doctrine according to which—this is also prepared by Spinoza—I am truly free if I follow my reason. Therefore if my society is a rational society and its laws are rational laws, I do not obey. I am a free man. I do what my reason dictates to me. All these doctrines are really attempts to circumvent the problem of authority, there is no question. But their historical power has been enormous, and in Spinoza we find many implications of that.

Now in order to understand this properly one would have to[5] contrast this directly with the classical notion. Let us take the Platonic solution, which is so obviously clear in its outlines, and everyone knows it. What is the solution in Plato?

Student: Rule of the wise.

LS: Rule of the wise. A rule of those who are by nature superior, and therefore there is no problem of authority. What is by nature inferior must of course, in its own self-interest and for its own perfection, obey what is by nature superior. That is the very elegant solution as broadly stated. But certain difficulties arise there. Yes?

Student: This conception doesn't consider freedom but justice. The whole notion of freedom which becomes the modern notion, if applied to the Platonic system, it seems to me, you don't find freedom, at least for those who are not at the top. Those [who are] not best will not be free.

LS: If freedom means license, then no. If freedom means freedom to act rationally, that is a great question. There is no freedom in the sense of doing what one likes regardless of whether it is reasonable or unreasonable. That is a great difficulty. In the present-day discussions you find frequently this view. We have a certain nice Anglo-Saxon tradition—Locke, Mill, and so on, up to the present day, and naturally of course in this country very powerful—which is a tradition of freedom. And then you have this strange older notion, not only among the classics but also in certain modern continental thinkers, such as Rousseau and the German Idealists, which has no real understanding for freedom. Empirically that makes some sense for practical purposes, but if we go somewhat deeper, we see that the Anglo-Saxon solution, while practically so sensible, is theoretically a very difficult thing to understand, because freedom does not mean here the freedom to act rightly. It means this by implication: it means also the freedom to act wrongly. Well, to take a very simple example, freedom of speech. Kant—who came very close to the Western notion, relatively close at any rate, and who was a very great thinker and therefore a very honest man—said the freedom of speech includes the right to lie. [This is] the same Kant who had said in his moral teaching that lying is sinful under all conditions, so much so that you cannot deceive a potential murderer who asks you: Where is that guy[6] I want to kill? You cannot say he is in New York or whatever; that is a lie. Because this fellow might take the train to New York and by some accident the potential victim might be in New York, and so [on].[7] This is why Kant is so severe regarding lying, much more than other teachers, and [yet he] said the natural right of freedom implies the right to lie. Do you recognize something of that, something empirically most potent from this abstract formulation?

Student: The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

LS: How does it go? Is there a protected right to lie?

Student: That is a disputed question.

LS: I would say, if there is no right to lie admitted, then we must have very severe censorship laws. In many other[8] [areas] you will find many things we regard now not only as inevitable

because of the shortcomings of human laws and this kind of thing, [but] that was always understood, that law cannot be so strict as morality proper can be, for this practical reason: [9]we give a moral dignity to certain rights which they never possessed in the past; and that is the implication of the modern liberal notion of freedom. That is a very grave theoretical problem, and it is so easy to dispose of it today by saying: Well, do you want to have communism or fascism? No sensible man wants that. And since there is no practical alternative, of course one may say: Let us accept an order which protects pornography and idiotic TV commercials. Because somehow these things seem to be inseparable, practically, from truly valuable freedoms. What one must only protest against is to say [that] the protection of pornography is in itself a great good. It is a great evil. That is, I think, a practical problem. Therefore I believe something more could be done without endangering the good freedoms,[10] [while] opposing these evil freedoms. You see? In Spinoza we see it in this way. [Whether] the basis from which he starts[11] remains the basis[12] [is yet] to be seen. The irrational fact that men regard themselves as equal is an important consideration in favor of democracy.

After having stated these points, he[13] applies it to the Hebrews under Moses and he tries to show that Moses, with a view to this difficulty, solved the problem. Now what is the Mosaic solution, in a nutshell?

Student: Essentially, Moses solves it through what would be implied out of the two alternatives as fraud. That is, Moses used religion and the ceremonial law to instill absolute obedience to the sense that it is God who rules, that there is something superhuman which rules.

LS: In other words, men do not resent divine compulsion accompanied by great promises.[14] [The demand was that men not have the feeling they were equal.] Promises, therefore: not fear, but hope is the motivation. This is roughly what he is suggesting.

There is one point, one of the few cases where he refers to contemporary facts. He turns to the Christian ceremonies and denies that they are of any relevance for the central teaching of Christianity, and then he gives a strange proof of that apart from his reading of the New Testament, and that you find on page 76, paragraph 4.

Reader:

> We have an example of this in Japan, where the Christian religion is forbidden, and the Dutch who live there are enjoined by their East India Company not to practice any outward rites of religion. (*TPT*, chap. 5)

LS: You know, fantastic stories were told by people envious of the Dutch mercantile successes in Japan. For example, it was said (I think Spinoza mentions this is one of his letters, if I remember well) that they had to spit on the cross in order to be admitted. And, well, in the conflict between temporal and eternal felicity they chose the proximate. But at any rate, it is funny that he chooses a certain contemporary lax practice as a proof of the true teaching of Christianity.

There is one more point, I think, which we must see. On page 77, paragraph 3, second half. I must say a word about the context. In the last section of chapter 5 he raises this question: How

far is knowledge of biblical history, i.e., a belief in the historical truth of the events described in the Bible, necessary for man's salvation, i.e., for men's beatitude? And he says: None whatever. Naturally, if the divine law is a natural law in the sense defined, and the natural law is self-sufficient for leading men to perfection, then no historical knowledge of any kind is required. You can read the Bible like any other book. Believe in the biblical histories or not believe in them, know them or not know them, that does not make any difference. But since very few people are rational and [they] do not act morally on the proper grounds, they are compelled to act morally on insufficient grounds, on what are theoretically improper grounds, namely, mere examples, mere history. And this is where the use of the Bible comes in: the Bible is useful for popular instruction, within limits. That is what Spinoza means. Here this paragraph to which I return:[15]

Reader:

> All Scripture was written primarily for an entire people, and secondarily for the whole human race; therefore its contents must necessarily be adapted as far as possible to the understanding of the masses, and proved only by examples drawn from experience.

LS: In other words, a kind of proof which can never be sufficient. That is the implication.

Reader:

> We will explain ourselves more clearly. The chief speculative doctrines taught in Scripture are the existence of God, or a Being Who made all things, and Who directs and sustains the world with consummate wisdom; furthermore, that God takes the greatest thought for men, or such of them as live piously and honorably, while He punishes, with various penalties, those who do evil, separating them from the good. All this is proved in Scripture entirely through experience—that is, through the narratives there related. No definitions of doctrine are given, but all the sayings and reasonings are adapted to the understanding of the masses. Although experience can give no clear knowledge of these things, nor explain the nature of God, nor how He directs and sustains all things, it can nevertheless teach and enlighten men sufficiently to impress obedience and devotion on their minds.
>
> It is now, I think, sufficiently clear what persons are bound to believe in the Scripture narratives, and in what degree they are so bound, for it evidently follows from what has been said that the knowledge of and belief in them is particularly necessary to the masses whose intellect is not capable of perceiving things clearly and distinctly. Further, he who denies them because he does not believe that God exists or takes thought for men and the world, may be accounted impious; but a man who is ignorant of them, and nevertheless knows by natural reason that God exists, as we have said, and has a true plan of life, is altogether blessed—yes, more blessed than the common herd of believers, because besides true opinions he possesses also a true and distinct conception. (*TPT*, chap. 5)

LS: Let us stop here. By the way, the translation is here bad. "He who does not know these histories and nevertheless knows by the natural light that God is, and what we have said is,

furthermore, not only that God is but that He exercises providence." Another mistake in the translation, by the way, is when he speaks of "masses." This doesn't exist in earlier languages. Spinoza says "plebs," the common people. The term "masses"[16] [has] an extremely interesting story, and as far as I know, it has never been cleared up. It became a politically powerful concept so far as I know only in the French Revolution, [with] this famous *levee en masse*, the call-up in the mass, of the people, for the defense of France. That is the term. And I would not be surprised if this use of the word[s] mass and masses has not something to do with modern physics, which uses, as you know, the concept of mass in a very precise sense. The term mass in religion is much older. In popular Calvinism, "mass of perdition" as far as I know goes back to Augustine, but there I don't believe it has this meaning which "mass" acquired in modern times. That is one of these many cases where we use terms thoughtlessly, which have very great implications. You know, masses: you think of stellar bodies guided by some law of gravitation; and this image has had a great influence on the understanding of social science: we have to study these movements of masses and how they impinge on one another. In former times, people wouldn't think of social things in these terms. If some one of you, or anyone else should occasionally go into the history of this term, it would be very revealing.

But that was not the reason why we read this passage. What strikes you in reading this passage in the light of what we read earlier, in the second chapter especially? Spinoza enumerates here the main tenets of biblical theology.[17] What did he say about biblical theology in the beginning? The Bible teaches nothing regarding speculation. Here he says something very important which the Bible teaches. That is one of the many contradictions. Now how could one resolve this contradiction?

Student: The Bible really doesn't teach this [just] because it's there. One would have to have knowledge in order to get it out of the Bible.

LS: That is another matter, that the Bible doesn't demonstrate it.[18] But don't forget what he says at the end of the passage we just read. These are true opinions. Of course they are not more than true opinions because they are not demonstrated, but they are true opinions. If you take this passage in isolation you would see that according to Spinoza, the Bible teaches most important speculative truths, but only in the form of opinions not demonstrated, in glaring contradiction to what went before. We cannot go into all these things. But that goes throughout the work, and an unwary reader is easily confused by this. Spinoza argues on at least two different levels. The first is biblicist: the only authority for spiritual truth is the Bible, the text of the Bible; and then on the second level, he denies the dignity of the Bible altogether. And he switches constantly from one to the other, and it requires much care in reading and also some information or learning in order to disentangle the strings.

Today he introduces the political problem for the first time, the problem of democracy (that we must keep in mind), and also the other point which we have seen in a way for the first time: there is no separation of politics from morals and from philosophy altogether. That is only a provisional acceptance of the Christian distinction between the temporal and spiritual and which he even radicalizes so that there is no connection whatever between the temporal and the spiritual. That is not Spinoza's last word, for the simple reason that the spiritual in the Christian sense doesn't exist for him. So what reason does he [even] have[19] to exaggerate?

Now the next chapter deals with something which is wholly unpolitical and where the usual apology on my part would seem to be required, but I mention only one point. The question of miracles which he discusses is the question of the self-sufficiency of natural science, of scientific explanation of phenomena; and Spinoza was the first who publicly stated that miracles are impossible. And naturally, all biblical miracles have to be interpreted in strictly scientific terms. Therefore we must watch very carefully what the precise argument is. Mr. ____ will do that.

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[1] Deleted "we can say"
[2] Deleted "Perhaps we begin at the top of page 74"
[4] Deleted "in a democracy"
[5] Deleted "go of course"
[6] Deleted "whom"
[7] Deleted "you have. Yes?"
[8] Deleted "things"
[9] Deleted "but that"
[10] Deleted "and"
[11] Deleted "here – whether that"
[12] Deleted "remains"
[13] Deleted "turns – he"
[14] Deleted "That they have not the feeling they were equal was the demand"
[15] Deleted "Since the whole Scripture has been revealed…" Yes"
[16] Deleted "is I think"
[17] Deleted "Well?"
[18] Deleted "But that's another matter."
[19] Moved "even"

Session 5: no date

Leo Strauss: There are two great difficulties. First, you spoke of a semantic argument. What do you mean by that? [i]

Student: By that I meant an argument which took its premises from the meaning of the word alone, the meaning of the word for miracle, and to show that in either case, whether it means a cause beyond that of nature or not.

LS: What bearing could such an argument possibly have?

Student: All of this was an attempt to show from the third point that miracles do not give any knowledge of God; rather they serve to complicate the matter.

LS: So that is not a semantic argument.

Student: By taking the premises from the meaning of the word, I considered that to be a semantic argument.

LS: So in other words, the argument would have this character. Taking a certain notion of the word miracle, say a common notion, I formulate it in a formal definition; and then I see that the view implied in this notion or definition is absurd. Is that what you have in mind?

Student: Yes.

LS: But that is not a semantic argument. The argument is a refutation, an attempt at [a] refutation of the popular notion. Semantic arguments can never decide such a question. A semantic argument can merely show that a certain word is misleading because it overlaps in meaning [with] another word—you know, this kind of thing.

Student: I see the difference between semantical and substantive. But when one argues from the meaning of the term, I take that to be what I call a semantic argument.

LS: But the point is not the questioned usage, but[1] question[ing] the truth of the opinion implied in usage. Yes?

Student: Yes.

LS: And therefore it is not semantic; but that is really minor, semantic. But I did not quite understand how you tried to resolve this difficulty toward the end of the chapter where Spinoza contrasts his treatment of miracles with his treatment of revelation. His treatment of miracles, he says, was strictly philosophic; his treatment of revelation was not philosophic but biblical, theological. That is the fact, yes? How does he justify this?

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[i] Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

Student: He then later shows that the biblical treatment . . . would lead to the same result.

LS: Yes. Good. We will come to that later. But why does he not use, or why does he claim not to have treated revelation philosophically, only biblically?

Student: Because again, the ordinary premises, of themselves—that is, by taking revelation to be what it claims to be, revealed truth, he then shows that even under this circumstance of prophecy . . .

LS: But is this the reason given by him for the different treatment? Why did he treat revelation theologically and not philosophically?

Student: Because he claims that it is beyond the powers of the human mind.

LS: Beyond human comprehension, and that is a purely theological question. But what do you say to that argument?

Student: Well, he shows that that's not the case.

LS: In other words, what is the link-up, the true link-up between the question of revelation and the question of miracles?

Student: That they can be decided on the same basis.

LS: Why?

Student: Because there is no revelation.

LS: No. That is the jump. Because revelation is a miracle. If miracles are impossible, revelation is impossible. Is that theologically sound, what I say? You see? But[2] the only question which will have to be settled is why Spinoza takes the trouble of[3] [dragging in] this additional red herring.[4] I once believed I had an answer, but I don't remember it now.

Now let us turn to the broader questions.[5] I mean, I would not wish to question your private beliefs, but I treat you entirely as a reasonable human being who has some familiarity with the position Spinoza attacks. You have read the Bible. Now is this argument convincing, looking at it dispassionately?

Student: I think so. That is, I think he convincingly shows that on whatever hypothesis you treat miracles, they simply contradict reason.

LS: What is the demonstration? You see, Spinoza raises an extraordinary claim. His great contemporary Hobbes also wrote a chapter on miracles in the *Leviathan*,[ii] but Hobbes does not go beyond saying miracles cannot be proven; and since they cannot be proven, no one can be

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[ii] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 37.

compelled rationally to accept them. And therefore the decision must rest with that man or body of men which decides all controversial questions, which can have political influence, i.e., the government. But Hobbes does not say miracles are impossible. Spinoza goes much beyond him and says: I can demonstrate the impossibility of miracles with no strain. Which is the nerve of the argument which you regard as demonstrative?

Student: He divides the chapter into four parts, and in each of these parts he gives several arguments, showing under any hypothesis you take . . .

LS: A simple argument would be sufficient now. Which argument do you regard as really demonstrative?

Student: The argument which relates miracles to events happening either in nature or beyond nature. Any miracle as an example would do.

LS: All right. Good. But how does he prove the impossibility of any miracles? Mr. ____?

Student: He proves it from his premise that the divine intellect and divine law are the same.

LS: Yes, but if someone says "I don't grant the premise"—the premise is not self-evident. You see, that is the point. A demonstration is not a demonstration by the mere fact that the conclusion follows from the premises. The premises themselves must be true, or if it is a perfect demonstration, they should be evident. All men are mortal; Socrates is a man; Socrates is a mortal. That is a good argument. Yes?

Student: When he does that, he says that the basic premise was proved earlier . . . but it wasn't proved in chapter 4.

LS: He didn't prove it. Or did you have any more special argument in mind?

Student: There is this train of arguments which does presuppose the theory, the argument which I called semantical and which you call substantive . . .

LS: All right. What is it?

Student: Attempts to show that under any view of miracles it results that the miracle contradicts the order of nature.

LS: But why? Let us limit ourselves to the argument that miracles contradict nature. Why does this prove that there is no natural order? Must the natural order be absolutely preserved in every point if there is to be a natural order?

Student: His whole idea of nature.

LS: All right, then we say his idea of nature, i.e., a special premise, which is not necessary. The point is one which does not need such a, you know, such big things . . .

Student:[6] Isn't the fundamental premise from which he starts off that there is only a natural order?

LS: Sure. I lay down the law.

Student: He certainly does something which was to become important later [and] proves that each miracle has its natural causes.

LS: Oh, that is very . . . Let us assume the story to which he refers, the story[7] [of] Elisha [and] the resurrection, that this was not a true resurrection because he was only apparently dead. Could be. But if the Bible itself in a given case indicates that is not meant to be a miracle, that is the utmost one could say. That doesn't prove the impossibility of any miracle. You see, there may be quite a few biblical facts which are traditionally regarded as technical miracles but are in fact not miracles.

Student: But the only proof of the existence of [a] miracle is the occurrence of [a] miracle, otherwise it cannot exist.

LS: But we are concerned now—you are touching on an important point, but it is not yet clearly expressed. Because Spinoza is not concerned merely with saying that [of] all miracles of which I have records, and [if] I look at each of them inductively, I see they are not evidently miracles. He says *impossibility* of miracles, because if he does not refute the possibility of miracles, there can always be some miracles in the Bible (or perhaps elsewhere), which would ruin his doctrine. That will not do. That is only a very provisional discussion, because we have to turn to his argument. Why is this whole issue important? Some of our friends, in social science especially, would even say: Well, that was a fight in the dark past among the wildest men on both sides. We don't care. Why is this important?

Student: He is going to establish the problem of natural law with regard to . . .

LS: Yes. But all right, but these same fellows in social science say: Who wants the natural law? That was also a part of this benighted past.[8] [But] today, if you would have a hard-boiled SS man, [a] social scientist, how could you show him that he is concerned with that question, only he doesn't know it? Mr. ____?

Student: Is not the nature of scientific law whether or not a descriptive law holds in every single case, or whether there is a possibility or chance of something not under the control . . .

LS: In other words, science excludes[9] the possibility of miracles by definition. When it investigates anything, for example, some strange election results somewhere, and someone will say "Well, that is a miracle," that would not be entertained for one moment.

Student: Besides, they admit[10] [science] only speaks of laws in terms of probability and always admits of the possibility of an interaction which comes very close to the conception of a miracle. That all I threw up may not come down. That they admit.

LS: I see. So in other words, to the extent to which modern science, at least a certain interpretation of modern science accepts Hume's criticism of causality, to that extent it makes allowance for miracles?

Student: Yes.

LS: That is true. So in other words, present-day science does not assert in any way the impossibility of miracles.

Student: Not to the extent that Spinoza is doing, certainly.

LS: There can only be one extent. Yes?

Student: To the extent that it makes allowances for miracles, it believes in miracles. Would these be miracles?[11] They say it is really possible if you throw a ball in the air it won't come down.

LS: That has grave implications, in the first place, historically. Social science must study the Bible: Judaism, Christianity, Islam.[12] According to their own interpretations, these religions are based on miracles. Well, but have you ever seen a scientific work on Judaism, Christianity or Islam in which the possibility of miracles is taken seriously? No. You see, there is still the difficulty. But at any rate the meaning of science is surely somehow at stake, what science is or is not. Someone else wanted—Mr. ____?

Student: I wanted to know: if all the miracles have a moral purpose as the Bible tells it, it is not just that the ball happened not to come down, but because one of the prophets said: I will show you it won't come down. Spinoza has the converse purpose of arguing [that] you cannot infer anything about the moral state of man from the physical things. Does he not refer to that in the *Ethics*, that the purpose of religion is not what was promised in the law, but that religion dealt with obedient and peaceful character of the spirit?

LS: And how is this directly related to the issue we are discussing now?

Student: He is trying to separate the moral and the external world.

LS: That is not quite true, because as I showed last time, contrary to certain assertions which Spinoza makes, his true conviction[13] includes what we now call physics.[14]

Student: Could it be that where Spinoza differs from modern science is his optimism that[15] through science,[16] complete knowledge could be obtained, therefore a miracle would not be something comprehended by science, and therefore science would be valid?

LS: Well, at least in this form: from Spinoza's point of view, there cannot be anything which is not in principle explainable in natural terms. Not in fact. That is not required. And that is of course what modern science up to a certain point claims, that every occurrence can be explained

in natural terms. But to understand the practical implications more simply, let us turn to two passages,[17] where we find a mere assertion, but we will know next time what it means.

Reader:

> Such are the principle subjects which will be discussed in this chapter—

LS: "which also I believe will not a little serve for the purpose of this whole work." In other words, this *Theologico-Political Treatise* requires the discussion of miracles, and in Spinoza's opinion it requires the refutation of the possibility of miracles. Now where does this come in [and] become clear? Spinoza divides the chapter into four parts. But the second part has a kind of appendix, and in this appendix the crucial point comes out most clearly. That begins in paragraph 30 of Bruder. Let me see: "Before I turn to the third point." Where does he say that? Page 87, third paragraph, second sentence. Let us turn to that.

Reader:

> Before passing on to my third point, I will adduce Scriptural authority for my assertion that God cannot be known from miracles. Scripture nowhere states the doctrine openly, but it can be readily inferred from several passages. First, that in which Moses commands (Deut. xiii.) that a false prophet should be put to death, even though he work miracles.

LS: Let us stop here. This appendix gives the scriptural proof of the fact that miracles do not bring about true knowledge of God. And then he goes on to show in the sequel (for example, page 88, paragraph 4) that the prophets lacked clarity about God's providence. The argument is this: if miracles could give clear knowledge of God's providence, the prophets would have had it. But the prophets were only concerned about the fact[18] [of] the prosperity of the wicked, and so on and so on, and this shows that they lacked knowledge about providence. Let us turn to the bottom of page 88 and read that.

Reader:

> It is plain, then, from Scripture itself, that miracles can give no knowledge of God, nor clearly teach us the providence of God. As to the frequent statements in Scripture, that God wrought miracles to make Himself plain to man—as in Exodus x.2, where He deceived the Egyptians, and gave signs of himself, that the Israelites might know that He was God—it does not, therefore, follow that miracles really taught this truth, but only that the Jews held opinions which laid them easily open to conviction by miracles. We have shown in Chap. II. that the reasons assigned by the prophets, or those which are formed from revelation, are not assigned in accordance with ideas universal and common to all, but in accordance with the accepted doctrines, however absurd, and with the opinions of those to whom the revelation was given, or those whom the Holy Spirit wished to convince.
>
> This we have illustrated by many Scriptural instances, and can further cite Paul, who to the Greeks was a Greek, and to the Jews a Jew. (*TPT*, chap. 6)

LS: In other words, Paul accepted the premises of his addressees regardless of the truth of these premises, and therefore one cannot regard his arguments as good. They were rhetorical arguments. Yes?

Reader:

> But although these miracles could convince the Egyptians and Jews from their standpoint—

LS: Yes, "from what they had granted," from their untrue or absurd premises. Yes?

Reader:

> they could not give a true idea and knowledge of God, but only cause them to admit that there was a Deity more powerful than anything known to them, and that this Deity took special care of the Jews, who had just then an unexpectedly happy issue of all their affairs. They could not teach them that God cares equally for all, for this can be taught only by philosophy.

LS: Stop here. So in other words, here Spinoza formulates the issue regarding providence more simply. Providence is universal providence; it takes care of all men equally. And this philosophy teaches, whereas the Bible teaches election, either of the Jews or of the elect from the Christian point of view. But what does this mean, that God cares equally for all? Now the answer to that question is given much later in the nineteenth chapter, to which we should turn. In your translation, on page 246, the third paragraph.

Reader:

> This conclusion is supported by experience, for we find traces of Divine justice only in places where just men bear sway; elsewhere the same lot (to repeat again Solomon's words) befalls the just and the unjust, the pure and the impure: a state of things which causes Divine Providence to be doubted by many who think that God immediately reigns among men, and directs all nature for their benefit.
>
> As, then, both reason and experience tell us that the Divine right is entirely dependent on the decrees of secular rulers, it follows that secular rulers are its proper interpreters. How this is so we shall now see, for it is time to show that the outward observances of religion, and all the external practices of piety should be brought into accordance with the public peace and well-being if we would obey God rightly. When this has been shown we shall easily understand how the sovereign rulers are the proper interpreters of religion and piety. (*TPT*, chap. 19)

LS:[19] That is the partial solution to that difficult passage in the sixth[20] [chapter]. People, and especially the prophets, doubted of providence because they had a false notion of providence. Here Spinoza sets forth what he regards as the true notion of providence. The true notion of providence was defined in chapter 6: God cares equally for all. That[21] is still a polite expression: he does not care at all for anyone; in this sense he cares equally for all. One fate meets the just and the unjust, and here we come to the grave practical conclusion: traces of divine justice are found only where just men reign. There is no just divine government in the strict sense. And now

we see the practical importance. Absolutely everything depends on human government, if you have any interest in justice. Politics becomes infinitely more important than theology. So this shows the practical importance. The significance of political action depends absolutely on the denial of miracles. The significance which Spinoza attaches to political action depends absolutely on his denial of miracles, because they depend on his denial of providence; and without providence, no miracles. That is the connection. Everything—the fate of justice in the world depends entirely on politics. That is the assertion of Spinoza. And so you see why that is very important. He would say: Wherever people believe in divine care of justice they will not take the necessary care for establishing justice on earth. The whole modern this-worldly politics in all its forms is based on this premise. Other people had said the same thing before—Machiavelli, for example. That is the practical importance of this question. There was another aspect of the practical question to which I will turn immediately. But was there anyone who wanted to ask a question?

Student: I just wanted to ask you about the paragraph on page 88, starting with Ezra.[22]

LS: Well, that is a long question, what that in itself means. According to the Jewish tradition the rabbis who put together the canon were in doubt whether Ecclesiastes should be put in the canon or not. And the decision was based, if I remember well, on the last word[s] of Ecclesiastes. The conclusion is they are in accordance with the Bible. That is a very long and difficult question.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: Well, of course then the great question arises: Do you not have to read any verse in the context? There are also similar troubles regarding the Bible, which I forgot now. You know the famous joke which people make regarding the American Constitution: you can read "Congress shall make no law" period. There are similar jokes about the biblical commandments, where you stop at a certain point and it says of course the opposite. But the question is—surely Spinoza has these verses and some others which[23] are the chief authority for him altogether. In the chapter in which he proves there is only the natural order, they are chiefly based on Solomon, on Ecclesiastes, Solomon being presupposed, that is an old story—Solomon's wisdom being entirely natural wisdom, not revealed wisdom. Now what is the point?

Student: Well . . . life of soul after death.

LS: There is no advantage of men over beasts.

Student: Would be one of the miracles referred to in chapter 6 on miracles.

LS: Which miracle?

Student: The possibility outside of nature of the existence of the soul after death.

LS: Immortality would be a better word. Sure, but Solomon seems to deny that. Well, that is a very long question into which we cannot go, whether Spinoza in some cases does not interpret a given biblical verse more correctly than it was traditionally interpreted. There was a certain kind

of harmonizing every biblical verse with a kind of strictly understood dogmatic teaching, which leads to difficulties. I remember one case in particular at the beginning of the Book of Judges. There are various reasons given, for example, as a means of punishment if you do not obey the law, and then there is one remark at the beginning of Judges which says they didn't conquer the valley because they did not have iron chariots:[iii] in other words, a purely military explanation. They were more urban people, the Canaanites, and they had iron chariots, and the Jews coming up from the desert didn't have any. I know one very orthodox interpreter who doesn't like this natural explanation, and therefore he tries to say the verse really means the Israelites did not conquer the country because they did not have iron chariots. In other words, he uses the same "no" twice, against all rules of grammar. Surely the orthodox interpretation is very frequently harmonistic, and Spinoza has some fun with that, there is no question. But that has nothing to do with the fundamental issue. Spinoza could have argued, if he had wanted, entirely differently and could have said there is no doctrine of miracles in the Bible in the technical sense, because a miracle is technically defined as an event deviating from natural events. Since there is no word for nature in Hebrew, in the Old Testament, there cannot be a miracle in the technical sense. That one could easily say, but the question is whether, if you go deeper into that, the problem doesn't return. In other words, the Bible may very well have a notion of miracle in a loose sense which nevertheless reproduces what later was theologically defined strictly as a miracle.

Student: Spinoza is very delicate on some subjects, by avoiding such things at least up to now such as the immortality of the soul, and rather than referring to the Old Testament it all stays within this framework. And I was wondering if this is merely one place where he directly answers on that basis.

LS: Well, that is not difficult to see through, in the case of Spinoza. He limits himself chiefly to the books of the Old Testament, but what he says includes of course also the New Testament. Of course, the question of miracle arises equally in the both cases, for example. That was only to make it easier[24] [for a] Christian public [to accept]. That doesn't mean more. And as for immortality of the soul, I am sure that immortality of the soul in any precise sense is incompatible with Spinoza because there is such a strict correspondence between body and soul in Spinoza, [so much so] that if the body dissolves, the soul must be dissolved too. That is, when you read his *Ethics*, quite evident. That was not an issue for him. But he doesn't emphasize it; that is quite true, but the implications are emphasized. Insofar as the implication of the distinction between the immortal soul and the mortal body is underlying the distinction between power spiritual and power temporal, where it becomes practical, there he needs it.

Now this is the other point where the question of miracles becomes practical and is not an academic issue, and that refers to the whole ecclesiastical order—I would say in every form, but surely most clearly in the form of traditional Judaism, in the form of Catholicism, and in the form of Presbyterianism,[25] namely, there is a divinely prescribed order for the salvation of the soul, and this of course is bound to have political consequences. At the end of the fifth chapter he quotes a passage from Maimonides, the most famous Jewish medieval writer, in which Maimonides appears to have said—but we can read it. Toward the end of the fifth chapter—we had no time last time to bring this up. Page 79 bottom.

[iii] Judges 1:19.

Reader:

> The Jews are of a directly contrary way of thinking, for they hold that true opinions and a true plan of life are of no service in attaining blessedness, if their possessors[iv] have arrived at them by the light of reason only, and not like the documents prophetically revealed to Moses.

LS: You see, here he limits himself to a Jewish example because that was less offensive. The same of course applies to the Christian teaching too. And then he quotes.

Reader:

> Maimonides ventures openly to make this assertion: "Every man who takes to heart the seven precepts and diligently follows them, is counted with the pious among the nations, and an heir of the world to come; that is to say, if he takes to heart and follows them because God ordained them in the law, and revealed to us by Moses, because they were of aforetime precepts to the sons of Noah: but he who follows them as led thereto by reason, is not counted as a dweller among the pious, nor among the wise of the nations." (*TPT*, chap. 5)

LS:[26] The seven commandments, that is a Jewish notion of the commandments given to Noah and his sons, which is the Jewish equivalent of the natural law, a law applying to all people. But as Maimonides says, they can be [27]sav[ed] only if they are accepted as divinely revealed.[v] Natural reason [alone] cannot lead anyone to salvation. Now with the necessary modifications, it is the old formula that there is no salvation except on the basis of belief in divine revelation, not on the basis of [inaudible] belief in any divine revelation, but it is specified. In the formulation of Calvin and Luther, there is no salvation without the church. But whichever form we take, on the basis of all these doctrines, even if the distinction between the spiritual and temporal is made, there is a natural supremacy of the spiritual, and therefore the practice of persecution, of intolerance, was an inevitable consequence. And that is of course what these men all tried to do: they all try to establish the supremacy of the power temporal in order to make impossible any interference by any allegedly spiritual power with freedom. This issue[28] no longer exist[s] in this form of liberal democracies, naturally, but if one does not remember it, one will not understand this kind of book. That was a practical issue. And you can easily see how this is connected with the question of miracles, because any claim on the part of the spiritual rests ultimately on the belief in miracles, every belief in revelation being as such belief in miracles, and therefore there is a necessary connection. The entirely different question is whether Spinoza has refuted the possibility of miracles as he claims to have done. But that it was necessary for him to face the issue is obvious; he could not very well avoid it. Or is it possible to assert the sovereignty of the power temporal without raising the question of the rule of any power spiritual? This problem is of course still alive today, you know.[29] The famous question regarding the meaning of the First

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[iv] This is referring to non-Jews, as is clear from context.

[v] The text of Maimonides as quoted by Spinoza is most likely corrupt, though as Strauss is fond of pointing out, the corrupt text is widely taken as authoritative as doctrine due to its inclusion in Joseph Caro's *Shulkhan Aruch*. It is unclear whether Spinoza's quotation is intentionally erroneous. See Strauss's comments in "1962 Preface" 13, *SCR* 293, and "Spinoza's Critique of Maimonides," in *Leo Strauss on Maimonides: The Complete Writings*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 122.

Amendment is somehow involved. The various doctrines and claims have changed, but partly owing to these discussions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. That one must keep in mind, otherwise one doesn't see that this is of any relevance. Well, perhaps we take this up on another occasion, because we must look at Spinoza's argument.

Now at the beginning of chapter 6 he gives a sketch of the problem, and this sketch looks like a real caricature of the issue: theology and philosophy. Can you recapitulate the main point?

Student: There are two orders in the world, an order of God and an order of nature. And God can, if he pleases, supervene upon the order of nature for some providential concern.

LS: In other words, the natural order is not created.

Student: It is created.

LS: It is created?

Student: He made it. In this part: "As most people say now, created."

LS: Yes, *now*. But it is not essential to the position. Now read the [full] sentence in which this clause occurs:

> They believe that God does not act as long as nature acts in its ordinary way, and conversely that the power of nature, natural causes, are[30] ineffective as [long as] God acts. Imagine then two powers numerically distinct from one another, namely the power of God and the power of natural things, which however is determined by God in a certain way or, as most people think today, created.[vi]

Now this creation is one special version of the doctrine. The main point is: two powers. Now if this is so, Spinoza says, then nature can't prove the existence of God, because the power of nature is something different from the power of God. The existence of God can only be proven by the fact that God subjects nature to his will, i.e., to prove it by a miracle. Now this doctrine you would never find in any theologian, respectable or unrespectable, and it takes some figuring out to see what Spinoza means.[31] He says a little bit later on that this doctrine has[32] its origin with the first Jews, and I think what Spinoza has in mind is a certain crude interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis. The first chapter of Genesis does not explicitly teach the creation out of nothing. It does not explicitly teach that. That is not an Old Testament expression: creation out of nothing. One can read the beginning as if there were a kind of chaos pre-existing which God formed into earth, into a created world. That is apparently the way in which Spinoza read this passage. This chaos was subjected to God. Now if this is so, if one accepts this as the meaning of the first chapter of Genesis, then of course it follows that only miracles can prove the power of God as distinguished from the power of, say, matter or of nature. The clear and distinct knowledge of God's power is possible only by looking at his victory over nature, his overcoming of nature by miracles, the premise being: only that can be true which can be clearly and distinctly understood. In an ordinary phenomenon you have some combination of God and nature, and

[vi] This appears to be Strauss's on-the-fly translation. *TPT,* chap. 6.

therefore no clear and distinct knowledge of the effect of God. So what Spinoza is suggesting is that [this] is really the primary thesis of the Old Testament, whatever later theologians, especially those now who speak of creation, say.[33] And the other point which he makes in the sequel: man is the most outstanding part of nature and hence the final cause of the whole. This is the premise of the belief in miracles. Now this has some biblical support, of course. Think of Genesis: man alone created in the image of God, and therefore, in a way, the whole created for the sake of man.

Now let us turn, however, to the crucial argument, to the proof, the alleged proof of the impossibility of miracles. The premise is the very questionable assertion that God's intellect is identical with God's will; therefore everything is necessary. Nothing is merely possible. Everything is necessary; there cannot be any deviation from the necessary order. This is, as I say, a mere assertion. Let us then continue. We are a bit closer to the real issue. Paragraph 11 in Bruder; where do we find that? On page 83, in the second paragraph, the second sentence. "Nor is there any sound reason for limiting."

Reader:

> Nor is there any sound reason for limiting the power and efficacy of nature, and asserting that her laws are fit for certain purposes, but not for all; for as the efficacy and power of nature are the efficacy and power of God, and as the laws and rules of nature are the decrees of God, it is in every way to be believed that the power of nature is infinite, and that her laws are broad enough to embrace everything conceived by the Divine intellect—

LS: So in other words, since the divine intellect refers to everything possible, therefore nature is capable of everything possible. That a miracle is possible is of course a part of the traditional definition, because what is not possible cannot ever[34] [arise]. Therefore the crucial point here is this. The ordinary view of miracles says that there [are] given event[s][35] which cannot have been produced naturally. That implies [that] the power of nature is limited. Spinoza says here the power of nature is unlimited, and therefore no event is naturally impossible. That I think is a more interesting assertion which he makes, which we must try to understand. You cannot say of any event, say, resurrection of the dead, that it transcends the power of nature. Now let us continue and read the next sentence, where we left off.

Reader:

> the only alternative is to assert that God has created nature so weak, and has ordained for her laws so barren, that He is repeatedly compelled to come afresh to her aid if He wishes that she should be preserved, and that things should happen as He desires: a conclusion, in my opinion, very far removed from reason.[36] (*TPT*, chap. 6)

LS: [This] refers to the final cause of miracles. And Spinoza implies here [that] an omnipotent God could have arranged the whole so that all miracles required, ever, could have become possible by natural causation.

To come back the main point:[37] the infinite power of nature. That is an assertion which is peculiar to Spinoza as a modern thinker. Now let us first pursue this point to its end. Of course you can say this is in itself an arbitrary assertion, [that] the power of nature is infinite. But let us see where it comes together with another point, in paragraph 24 [in] Bruder.

Student: Isn't that the same assertion as the intellect and the will of God are equivalent, to say [the] power of nature is unlimited?

LS: Yes, but I prefer this formulation because it is linked up with another approach to the problem to which I will try to return. Now let me see in paragraph 24, where the second point begins. Yes, on page 86, second paragraph.

Reader:

> It is only phenomena that we clearly and distinctly understand, which heighten our knowledge of God, and most clearly indicate His will and decrees. Plainly, they are but triflers who, when they cannot explain a thing, run back to the will of God; this is, truly, a ridiculous way of expressing ignorance. Again, even supposing that some conclusion could be drawn from miracles, we could not possibly infer from them the existence of God: for a miracle being an event under limitations is the expression of a fixed and limited power; therefore we could not possibly infer from an effect of this kind the existence of a cause whose power is infinite, but at the utmost only of a cause whose power is greater than that of the said effect. I say at the utmost, for a phenomenon may be the result of many concurrent causes, and its power may be less than the power of the sum of such causes, but far greater than that of any one of them taken individually. (*TPT*, chap. 6)

LS: Let us stop here. Now what does he say here? Let us assume[38] a phenomenon appears, thought to be a miracle. We have to prove that is a miracle. Can we prove it? Can we ever prove any event a miracle? You see, this argument, which I am now going to develop, [which] is implied by Spinoza more than [it is] set forth, starts not from the possibility of miracles but from the knowability of miracles.[39] [This is also the way] Hobbes pursued exclusively. No infinite cause can be proved by any event. Every event, being finite, limited, specific, distinguished from others, cannot as such have a simply infinite cause, because the event may be most extraordinary and overwhelming and yet it can be due to the concurrence of many, of very many or infinitely many, trivial causes. Miracles are not knowable as such. This is linked up with the view of the infinity of the power of nature. If the power of nature is infinite, natural science, our knowledge of nature, is only possible in the form of an infinite process. We never possess, [never] can possess, completed knowledge of nature.

This is a point which plays a very great role in modern thought, and which is characteristic of the modern argument. Now let us assume that it is true. If miracles are not knowable—in other words, if it can never be demonstrated that a given event is miraculous, what follows from that? Well, then God as a wise being will not perform miracles, because miracles would be regarded as miracles only by people who do not analyze the phenomenon sufficiently. Following the spirit of science you can never reach the result, [that] this [event] is surely impossible for nature to

produce. So in other words, from this point of view the issue is inverted. The impossibility of miracles follows from the unknowability of nature.

Now let us see whether this is sufficient for Spinoza's purpose.[40] Let us take an example, say, resurrection. We [inaudible][vii] evidence for that, but one can say certainly that when Spinoza is confronted with such phenomena or alleged phenomena as resurrection, Spinoza would say it is impossible, in spite of the fact that he admits the limited character of his knowledge of what is possible by nature. He has in fact no hesitation in crucial cases to say: this is impossible, this can never have happened. That is the real difficulty with Spinoza's doctrine, and not only of Spinoza. That is the reason why I have developed[41] [this]. What is the way out? I would like to refer you to a parallel in Spinoza's Letters. It is in Letter 23 in the old counting which I have,[viii] a letter to Oldenburg.[42] Rabbi ____, will you read it?

Reader:

> I join with you in acknowledging human weakness. But on the other hand, I venture to ask you whether we "human pigmies" possess sufficient knowledge of nature to be able to lay down the limits of its force and power, or to say that a given thing surpasses that power?

LS: You see, he turns the tables. He says to the theologians—the theologians accuse the philosophers of presumptuousness, and he says: Well, you are presumptuous, because you claim to know that this is a miracle, i.e., to claim to know the limitations of nature. Go on.

Reader:

> No one could go so far without arrogance. We may, therefore, without presumption explain miracles as far as possible by natural causes. When we cannot explain them, nor even to prove their impossibility, we may well suspend our judgment about them, and establish religion, as I have said, solely by the wisdom of its doctrines.[43][ix]

LS: Let us stop here. In other words, the scientist will either be able to give a natural explanation on the basis of the knowledge available to mankind, or else he will suspend his judgment, the suspense of his judgment being based on the view of an infinite progress of science: what is not explicable today may be explicable in a later generation. And this is ultimately based in Spinoza's view in the belief of the infinity of the power of nature. And of course today no one would speak any more of the infinity of the power of nature, but one could still say [that] the metaphysical premise of the belief in the possibility of infinite progress of knowledge of nature is the assumption of an inner infinity of nature. If nature were not itself infinite, there could not be infinite progress of its knowledge. But the difficulty is this. To repeat, Spinoza turns the tables and says: I argue from the unknowability of miracles, and from this there follows indirectly the

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[vii] There is a word or phrase missing here, which might have been inaudible.

[viii] This is Letter 75 in most modern editions (Letter to Oldenburg, December 1675). Henry Oldenburg was the first Secretary of the Royal Society, in which position he played a major role in the collection and dissemination of the latest scientific knowledge to and from the continent. He corresponded with Spinoza over a long period.

[ix] In *The Chief Works of Benedict De Spinoza*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes, vol. 2, 303.

impossibility of miracles. But the difficulty[44] is that certain things which are claimed to have happened are impossible according to nature, and therefore miracles are knowable. To take the simplest example, resurrection is knowable[45] [as] a miracle. There Spinoza says: Hence it has not happened. But how can he do that? There must be a lacuna in the argument, and this comes out when we turn toward the end of the chapter, when he turns to the fourth point. Page 92, the third paragraph.

Reader:

> It is very rare for men to relate an event simply as it happened, without adding any element of their own judgment. When they see or hear anything new, they are, unless strictly on their guard, so occupied with their own preconceived opinions that they perceive something quite different from the plain facts seen or heard, especially if such facts surpass the comprehension of the beholder or hearer, and, most of all, is he is interested in their happening in a given way.
>
> Thus men relate in chronicles and histories their own opinions rather than actual events so that one and the same event is so differently related by two men of different opinions, that it seems like two separate occurrences; and, further, it is very easy from historical chronicles to gather the personal opinions of the historian.
>
> I could cite many instances in proof of this from the writings both of natural philosophers and historians, but I will content myself with one only from Scripture, and leave the reader to judge of the rest.
>
> In the time of Joshua the Hebrews held the ordinary opinion that the sun moves with a daily motion, and that the earth remains at rest; to this preconceived opinion they adapted the miracle which occurred during their battle with the five kings. They did not simply relate that that day was longer than usual, but asserted that the sun and moon stood still, or ceased from their motion—a statement which would be of great service to them at that time in convincing and proving by experience to the Gentiles, who worshipped the sun, that the sun was under the control of another deity who could compel it to change its daily course. Thus, partly through religious motives, partly through preconceived opinions, they conceived of and related the occurrence as something quite different from what really happened.[x] (*TPT*, chap. 6)

LS: —the true doctrine. If he did not know that, how would he really be entitled to be [an] observer of such a subtlety as is concerned in this question of miracles? The miracles were reported by people who did not know scientific observation; therefore we cannot take these reported miracles as true. Let us read the last paragraph[46] of this chapter, the quotation of Josephus. You know who Josephus is? He is the historian of the Jews at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, who had been educated in Greek lore and wrote in Greek. Yes. Now what does he say?

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[x] It is likely that the tape was changed at this point.

Reader:

> This is also the opinion of Josephus, for at the conclusion of the second book of his "Antiquities," he writes: "Let no man think this story incredible of the sea's dividing to save these people, for we find it in ancient records that this hath been seen before, whether by God's extraordinary will or by the course of nature it is indifferent. The same thing happened one time to the *Macedonians*, under the command of *Alexander*, when for want of another passage the *Pamphylian* Sea divided to make them way; God's Providence making use of *Alexander* at that time as His instrument for destroying the *Persian* Empire. This is attested by all the historians who have pretended to write the Life of that Prince. But people are at liberty to think what they please."[xi] (*TPT*, chap. 6)

LS: You see, in other words, we have no more and no less right to believe in the biblical miracles as in the pagan miracles. The cognitive status of both is equal. But what would a theologian reply to this point? Are there no such supranatural events among pagans? Think of the Egyptian sorcerers in the story of Moses. There would have to be introduced supernatural demons or something like this as supernatural agents working for pagans, for idolaters. In other words, the whole doctrine of miracles as fully developed is linked up with many assertions, for example, the belief in demons, and the credibility of the one recedes with the credibility of the other. That is fundamentally what happened in modern times. This has nothing to do with the question of theoretical truth or untruth—you don't have to go into the question of demons, among other things, but from the point of view of [the] general history of culture. Therefore such very extraneous things which theologically are irrelevant, like the question of witchcraft, had an amazing repercussion regarding the issues which were theological strictly speaking.

I can only repeat what I said at the beginning. When you turn, on the basis of certain knowledge of the theological question, to the text of Spinoza's sixth chapter, one is amazed by the boldness, not only of his assertions, but of what he regards as a demonstration. To recognize that part which would have made some sense a few centuries later, one has[47] to recreate the argument which starts, not from the impossibility of miracles, but from the unknowability of miracles—which, as I mentioned before, was the characteristic assertion of Hobbes rather than Spinoza. And yet one cannot deny (that would lead us much too far) that this leading formula, God's intelligence identical with God's will, is a kind of shorthand for these extensive discussions in the middle ages which are linked up with what is vulgarly called Averroism. Averroism in the strict sense means the Aristotelians, the hundred-percent Aristotelians of the middle ages, who did not accept revelation. From the Aristotelian point of view there is of course no possibility of miracle, although Aristotle never discussed that, but the Aristotelian god is not a god who could perform it. And therefore the people familiar with the Bible, or for that matter with the Koran, were of course exposed to these problems and discussed them. Spinoza is an heir of these people. And therefore he uses these abbreviations,[48] which he can still assume people can understand[49]. We today are unable to understand that if we do not first go into historical studies and discover or disinter the background of Spinoza.

But one point should be clear, because that is essential for an understanding of Spinoza's whole enterprise, and that is [that] the whole theme of Spinoza's politics depends on the denial of

[xi] Italics in original.

miracles. And if Spinoza wants to be a serious man, not a man who engages in these value judgments—that anyone can do without any effort—but as a serious man he must refute it. If he cannot refute the possibility of miracles and still wants to have a practically complete independence of the power temporal, of the political power, then he would have to argue in an entirely different way. But he is concerned not only with establishing a sovereign political power in no way subject to[50] a spiritual power; he is also concerned with establishing the independent authority of philosophy versus theology. That is as much his aim here as the independence of politics. Now[51] as long as[52] theology, meaning revealed theology, is admitted even as a possibility, the sovereignty of philosophy is a problematic thing. As long as the revealed religion is admitted, of course revealed religion takes the precedence. That's clear. There may be a subordinate right of philosophy in its order, but sooner or later questions of true distinctions arise between philosophy and the Bible. If a man admits then the possibility of revealed theology and denies the certainty of any revealed religion claiming to be the true theology, then a certain skepticism is essential, which Spinoza thinks is incompatible with philosophy, and which I think would show up in many other ways. Therefore[53] from Spinoza's point of view [it is] absolutely essential, what he does: the sovereignty of philosophy combined with the sovereignty of political society. That is his objective. His historical significance consists in the fact that he did this in this crucial epoch, in the seventeenth century, with greater energy, with greater power than anyone else. I mean, Hobbes meant the same, but Hobbes is more prudent, strange as that sounds. You know, Hobbes has a reputation as being a very tough and ruthless fellow, but he himself admitted[54] that Spinoza was more radical. And in the case of miracles it is very clear: Hobbes never went beyond denying the knowability of miracles, not the possibility. I am sure he did not believe in the possibility, but he never openly said so. Now is there any special point you would like to bring up?

Student: Doesn't the unknowability of miracles also involve the unknowability of nature?

LS: I don't understand you. As I stated it, the infinity of nature is the premise of the impossibility of miracles.

Student: But doesn't it reverse itself when the unknowability of miracle is given, because man has not the intellect to comprehend?

LS: That is the point. That is indicated by Spinoza near the beginning of the chapter in the discussion of the first point, where he has these references to universal doubt. Now what Spinoza says, in a way following Descartes, is this. We have literally, he says in the *Ethics*, we possess adequate knowledge of the essence of God. Literally, whatever God may mean in Spinoza. But surely infinite power. We possess adequate knowledge of the infinity of the first cause, that he surely means. So Spinoza claims we know the infinity. Well, just as in Newtonian physics, infinity of space is connected with that. We know infinity. We know the fact of infinity, which means of course we cannot possibly know every part of it, because that is infinite. We know the fact of infinity; we know the fact of the infinity of nature. That we know. How? We would have to read the first ten or fifteen propositions of the *Ethics* and see whether that is knowledge.

Student: But does that mean that the intellect of man is at all—does knowing the fact of infinity involve . . .

LS: No. Well, let me state it this way. The knowledge of infinity is itself a finite knowledge. Infinite knowledge is for man strictly speaking impossible, for the Aristotelian reason.[55] We cannot possibly know all cows in the universe. You know, there are innumerable cows. Well, someone may make a statistic. But that gives you at most the knowledge—well, what is literally infinite cannot be known by man; that Spinoza doesn't deny. But Spinoza says we can know the fact of infinity, and that is all he needs for this purpose. And that would turn around the[56] beginning of his *Ethics*. We may take this up at the end of this course. That is the same difficulty we have [had] already [up] to now. All the denials of theological principles which you have in the *Ethics* are implied in certain definitions given at the beginning of the *Ethics*. These definitions are not justified; they are taken for granted. The whole cognitive status of the *Ethics* is therefore very problematic. You would only push the question back.

Student: The definition of substance, for example.

LS: Is arbitrary? One can say that Spinoza's definition of substance—a being which is by itself and is understood by itself—implies the whole teaching of the *Ethics*. From this it follows that a man cannot be substance, because a man cannot be an island unto himself. Take the definition "man is a rational animal." You have to refer to animal when you say man. Nor can you understand animal, because you have to refer to a higher genus. I give a very superficial account. The conclusion is [that] there can only be one substance, and that substance is called God. Spinoza has reasons, I am sure, for that definition, but he doesn't give these reasons. And one can very well argue that the ultimate reason for the definitions at the beginning of the *Ethics* is this: On which premises must I start in order to guarantee the possibility of clear and distinct knowledge, i.e., scientific knowledge, of everything? But that is obviously circular. You guarantee the possibility of scientific knowledge by finding out what are the premises of the possibility of scientific knowledge. That is the reason why I believe that Spinoza is in many ways closer to present-day science than he appears at first sight. At first sight he appears to be a traditional metaphysician. In other words, these definitions are[57] in between Aristotelian definitions and operational definitions, with a view to the purpose the definitions are meant to serve. That will be our task in studying Spinoza's political doctrine: To what extent is his political doctrine independent of these very problematic metaphysical premises? After all, when you speak about politics, whatever your premise may be, you have to speak about political phenomena in their peculiarity, as you have observed them. And there must be some access beyond this merely methodological or merely metaphysical problem which comes to sight in his political doctrine. I cannot repeat that now, it is too late. I have to remind [you] of it perhaps next time. We have already come across a certain formulation of the political problem as Spinoza gave it which does not depend on the peculiarity, what he said in the fifth chapter about the issue as between democracy and non-democracy. I cannot do that now. Is there any other question?

Student: I was wondering—he talks of primary notions, but he never tells us what they are.

LS: No, he doesn't do that. That is addressed only to those readers familiar with the principles of logic.

Student: Isn't he implying that if our thought depended on something unfathomable and, for all we know, omnipotent, that we couldn't trust anyone?

LS: I cannot go into that now. Regarding this reference at the beginning—by the way, you know there are annotations to the different chapters which this translator prints at the end of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, and you might have a look. It is a good idea to look at that. Now in this note near the beginning of the sixth chapter, Spinoza refers to his only [prior] publication[58], and that is called *Principles of Philosophy Demonstrated in a Geometric Manner*—but[59] [those are] not Spinoza's principles,[60] [those are] Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy*, which Spinoza quasi-rewrote in a mathematic[al] form. And you see how little Spinoza is[61] concerned with hundred percent theoretical correctness from his point of view. Apparently for some practical reasons he found it necessary to write the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. He could not lay the foundations properly here for a number of reasons, and therefore he left it at certain sweeping formulae of which he must have been sure that they cannot have any influence on the large majority of his readers, only particular arguments could. For example, what Mr. ____ referred to, individual biblical quotations which would create some doubt, some discomfort regarding the traditional doctrine, for example, when he takes the passages at the beginning, the story of the Fall, God taking a walk in the Garden. Now there were of course infinite allegorical commentaries on that; it does not have to be taken literally. But Spinoza argues now in a somewhat changed world where the principle became more and more accepted that the literal meaning, the strictly understood literal meaning is *the* meaning.[62] Moses must have thought that God was walking in the Garden. Locomotion; he must somehow be a bodily being. Can this be an authority, a book in which such a thing is said? This kind of doubt is at least a practical purpose regarding the question of principle. But the main point which he wants to make of course are the practical proposals, especially regarding the freedom of speech or the freedom of philosophizing, which he discusses explicitly only in the twentieth or last chapter, but for which all the preceding chapters are preparation. Even[63] what he will discuss next time, the question of the interpretation of Scripture, has of course also this meaning: to show that this interpretation of Scripture cannot be settled by any authority, and therefore everyone must have the right to interpret the Bible as he sees fit. That is a part of this freedom of speech, freedom of philosophizing, for which he has written the book.

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[1] Deleted "you"
[2] Deleted "the question is"
[3] Deleted "making"
[4] Deleted "Student: What? **LS**: The only question would be why does Spinoza take the trouble of digging in this additional red herring."
[5] Deleted "If you read"
[6] Deleted "I want to say"
[7] Deleted "from"
[8] Deleted "From
[9] Deleted "as is known understood"
[10] Deleted "it"
[11] Deleted "Pardon?. Student: Would this be a miracle?"
[12] Deleted "It must therefore"
[13] Deleted "is that"
[14] Deleted "You see. That is not true"
[15] Deleted "science that"
[16] Deleted "that"
[17] Deleted "the first is on page 82, second paragraph from the bottom"

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[18] Deleted “that”
[19] Deleted “Here”
[20] Deleted “book”
[21] Deleted “therefore”
[22] Deleted “Yes. Student: Which would indicate that the…”
[23] Deleted “land – some of them”
[24] Deleted “of acceptance to a”
[25] Moved “most obviously”
[26] Deleted That is all. Now what Maimonides seems to say – well.
[27] Deleted “saving”
[28] Deleted “this”
[29] Deleted “in various forms it”
[30] Moved “as long”
[31] Deleted “He refers”
[32] Deleted “taken”
[33] Deleted “Yes. Now let us turn:
[34] Deleted “come afterwards”
[35] Deleted “and”
[36] Deleted “So in the words that”
[37] Deleted “the main point is”
[38] Deleted “we have a phenomenon”
[39] Deleted “The way in which”
[40] Deleted “Now”
[41] Deleted “that”
[42] Deleted “If you give me your copy I will find it for you. It is near the end of the Letters. Thank you. On page 303, center. “I join with you in acknowledging human weakness.” Do you have it?”
[43] Deleted “Let us stop here”
[44] Deleted “to repeat”
[45] Deleted “to be”
[46] Deleted “of the last sentence, you could say”
[47] Deleted “really to think of – one has”
[48] Deleted “of”
[49] Deleted “it”
[50] Deleted “the”
[51] Deleted “the independence”
[52] Deleted “there is”
[53] Deleted “it is”
[54] Deleted “that”
[55] Deleted “And”
[56] Deleted “first”
[57] Deleted “an”
[58] Deleted “which he had made before”
[59] Deleted “that is”
[60] Deleted “that is”
[61] Deleted “here”
[62] Deleted “Then”
[63] Deleted “when he discusses”

Session 6: no date

Leo Strauss: In the first place there is one point which you made—I don't know whether you are right[1]—[that] Spinoza makes a distinction between writers and authors. [i] Sometimes he speaks of the biblical authors, and sometimes of the biblical writers.

Student: No.

LS: The statement, I'm afraid, is of no value because the translator is not literal enough. You may be right, but by sheer accident. Mr. ____?

Student: [It reads] "Of the authors or" in parenthesis "(if the expression be preferred),[2] the writers."[ii][3]

LS: That looks as if it were literal. Well, maybe we come across it later. Thank you for this information, it was a good point.

You raised[4] [another] question: Why does he treat the Bible like nature? And your answer was, he regards the Bible as a human document. And men are natural beings, and therefore the productions of men, their books, have to be approached that way. And the difficulty which you raised was that the Bible is supernatural, at least to some extent, and hence his method is questionable. But speaking only from Spinoza's premises, if your argument were correct, this method of reading books would have to be applied to all books, all books being the works of human beings. Now you have yourself referred to the statement about Euclid, where he applies an entirely different method, not following the method of studying nature. You just sit down and read Euclid and you understand him; you don't need this complicated method. Therefore the explanation which you gave is not sufficient. He has something else in mind. We will see what that is. There was another point which you made: philosophy is not needed for understanding the Bible. That is surely what Spinoza says, and you say he must contradict himself because he does use philosophy for understanding the Bible. Yes, but it is not quite so simple. Why is this his argument?[5] To what extent is philosophy not needed for understanding the Bible? To whom is the Bible addressed?

Student: The Bible is addressed to the multitude.

LS: To non-philosophers, to people who are not necessarily philosophers. Therefore it should be possible to understand the Bible without philosophy. But we must see whether your point doesn't come in on a higher level again.

You made an allusion to the fact that Spinoza's work, especially the chapters beginning here, had a great historical significance—you know, the Old Testament criticism which began in the open in the seventeenth century. Hobbes also has some remarks in his *Leviathan*. And there was

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[i] The session began with the reading of a student paper, followed by Strauss's comments. The reading was not recorded.

[ii] The phrase in question appears in the middle of page 109 in the standard Gebhardt pagination, and is line 7.10.1 in the Bruder edition.

another man who is also mentioned in this connection who is otherwise forgotten today, who wrote a book, *The Pre-Adamites*, at about the same time, 1655, in which he also brings in some rudimentary remarks about biblical criticism.[iii] But Spinoza is surely [the] more important of these two. Spinoza established openly the principle that the Bible must be read like any other book, and therefore the methods of historical criticism regarding manuscripts, regarding [the] life and circumstances of the author and so on, have to be applied to the Bible as well. And I think[6] [at this level of] generality[7] [this] is now rather generally admitted. I believe the only exceptions are strictly orthodox Jews and fundamentalist Protestants. The Catholic Church admits that principle, doesn't it? Do you know?[iv] Well, [in] the Catholic Church,[8] of course, since the ecclesiastical authority vouchsafes the authority of the Bible, the Bible does not in itself have the absolute authority which it has for Protestants. In the case of the Jews it is somewhat different, but in fact[9] orthodox Jews reject, as you know, all biblical criticism up to the present day. Well, more specifically, the meaning being [that] the literal sense of the Bible is the most important sense. That is the implication. Spinoza knows of course that there are quite a few biblical passages which are metaphorically meant, where similes are used, for example; and there the literal understanding is naturally the understanding[10] [of] the passage as metaphorical, but otherwise not. I do not know what Spinoza would say about such questions as, for example, whether the six days of the first chapter of Genesis have to be understood literally as days, which would lead to the great difficulty that days presuppose the existence of the sun, which was created on the fourth day, and this kind of thing. I do not know what he would do in this case. But in other cases he makes it perfectly clear the literal sense is the authoritative sense.

You have referred to this fact that at the beginning of this chapter and also in[11] [the middle] he refers to the problem of tolerance. We must never forget that. That is the practical meaning of these discussions. What Spinoza is driving at is that the state has no right to prescribe in matters of religion. That must be left to the private judgment. The state has to tolerate and therefore to protect every religion. That is the doctrine at which he is driving. And there is no other authority which can limit the state; there is no ecclesiastical authority. The difficulty is this: from the point of view of religion, not all religions are equal. The state treats them as equal; that means toleration. But from the point of view of religions, not all religions are equal: there is only one true religion, and therefore the problem remains. And one would have to study whether the modern, say, especially the American solution, is a theoretically fully adequate one. Strictly speaking, if there is one and only one true religion, then the one true religion may say that of right it ought to be the established religion, to be supported by the civil power, for example, by prohibition against heretical propaganda, perhaps by a lessening of the civil rights of the heretics, perhaps even by their expulsion. These conclusions were drawn in former times with[12] enormous practical consequences. Spinoza is against that.

Now how can he argue against it on two levels, as we have seen?[13] [One way is] by interpreting the document of revelation, which means for Christians, the Bible, Old and New Testament,

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[iii] Strauss is referring to the work of Isaac La Peyrère (1596-1676), a converted French Catholic theologian who had some influence on the Biblical theories of Hobbes and Spinoza, as well as on Manasseh Ben Israel, a prominent Rabbi in the Amsterdam Jewish community who may have been an early instructor of Spinoza. La Peyrère was briefly imprisoned for the work *Prae-Adamitae* (1655), which was publicly burned in Paris.

[iv] Evidently addressed to a particular student or auditor.

[but] especially the New Testament. And there his argument is very simple. The overriding commandment of the New Testament is charity, and charity is incompatible with any intolerance. That settles it, from his point of view. A simple solution; but whether it is sufficient is another matter, because what about teachings, apparently religious, which may render questionable the command of charity? There the question will immediately arise. The alternative is—and that is what he is ultimately driving at—rejecting all revelation. And therefore there is no ground, no rational ground, for religious intolerance because all religion, i.e., all revealed religion, rests on unreasonable grounds. But here you get into other troubles. From this point of view you can then say the state should make any regulations it sees fit regarding such an unreasonable claim if it so unreasonable in itself. Of course you can say it is negligible—you know, about the trivial things, the judge or the state doesn't care. But any trivial thing might become politically relevant, and then you cannot deny the state in principle the right of religious intoleration.

This is in a nutshell the broad problem with which Spinoza is concerned. One cannot get a right of tolerance, it would seem, an unqualified right of religious toleration, without having a high regard for religion; and on the other hand, if you have a high regard for religion, that means you are committed to this or that religion, and this acts as a limitation on the principle of tolerance. That's the difficulty. We having a working practical solution today, but theoretically that's a problem. And I think if one analyzes[14] the solution [more deeply], there is of course one alternative which is probably preferred as far as I can see, although I could not quote chapter and verse now, that there is only one religion. These teachings are not so definable; there is always an admixture of human error and folly and sin in it, and therefore humility is becoming, and therefore abstention from intolerance is becoming, even for those who adhere to the true religion because that to which they adhere as they understand it is never quite free from human elements, from sin. That is perhaps the way in which one can start, I do not know; at least we cannot go into that now.

Now let us turn then to a discussion of the chapter. He begins very clearly. The conflict between the Christian teaching of love and the practice of persecution, that is a fact: the men who claim to believe in the religion of love do such things as Cromwell did in Ireland and as the French government did against the Protestants on St. Bartholomew's Day.[v] There is a problem here. How does this conflict arise? Spinoza says [it's] because[15] dogma was substituted for the moral teaching or took precedence over the moral teaching, so that the dogmatic differences were regarded as much more important than the teaching of love. And the men who effected this substitution were the theologians. These theologians were very far from being embodiments of charity; they were concerned with preserving their authority. What is necessary is true respect for Holy Writ, a respect showing itself in deed, not in speeches only, showing itself [in] the practice of love and adhering to the clear teachings of the Bible and nothing else. The clear teaching of the Bible, that is the implication, is unqualifiedly in favor of charity and not of persecution. In this context, if you turn to page 99, second paragraph.

Reader:

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[v] The Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre took place in 1572 during the French wars of religion, claiming some four thousand victims in three days of Catholic violence against Huguenots (French Calvinist Protestants).

> To these evils we must add superstition, which teaches men to despise reason and nature, and only to admire and venerate that which is repugnant to both: whence it is not wonderful that for the sake of increasing the admiration and veneration felt for Scripture, men strive to explain it so as to make it appear to contradict, as far as possible, both one and the other: thus they dream that most profound mysteries lie hid in the Bible, and weary themselves out in the investigation of these absurdities, to the neglect of what is useful. Every result of their diseased imagination they attribute to the Holy Ghost, and strive to defend with the utmost zeal and passion; for it is an observed fact that men employ their reason to defend conclusions arrived at by reason, but conclusions arrived at by the passions are defended by the passions. (*TPT*, chap. 7)

LS: Let us stop here. So Spinoza says [that in addition] to this evil inherently possible on the basis on the Bible, namely, the substitution of dogma for the moral teaching, there is the additional extraneous evil of superstition. Superstition,[16] [it] is here implied, is not something coming from the Bible but is something characteristic of man as man; and superstition shows itself in the contempt for reason. So the true corruption of Scripture proper consists in the admixture of human speculation as such. The element of speculation is a contempt for human speculation and the great admiration for the supernatural as supernatural. So, since all evils can be traced to the influence of misunderstood Scripture, it is of the utmost practical importance that one understand the Scripture itself,[vi] and for this purpose Spinoza says we must devise the true method of interpreting the Scripture. [We should read what he says] regarding this method in general. That is on page 99; perhaps we readjust paragraph 3.

Reader:

> If we would separate ourselves from the crowd and escape from theological prejudices, instead of rashly accepting human commentaries for Divine documents—

LS: "Human figments" would be more literal.

Reader:

> we must consider the true method of interpreting Scripture and dwell upon it at some length: for if we remain in ignorance of this we cannot know, certainly, what the Bible and the Holy Spirit wish to teach.

[vi] The prior two sentences appear obscure on face value. It is possible that in the first sentence Strauss intended to say "the element of superstition is a contempt for human speculation." Moreover, the claim in the second sentence that "all evils can be traced to the influence of misunderstood Scripture" would seem to contradict the claim just a few lines earlier that "superstition . . . is not coming from the Bible, but is something characteristic of man as man." The resolution would seem to be in the word *misunderstood*: the element of superstition clouds speculative reason, causing Scripture to be misunderstood (in Spinoza's view) and instrumentalized to justify acts not in line with the teaching of charity; an investigation into the true meaning of the Bible (as Spinoza interprets it) would counteract this misunderstanding.

> I may sum up the matter by saying that the method of interpreting Scripture does not widely differ from the method of interpreting nature—in fact, it is almost the same.

LS: "Does not differ from the method of interpreting nature, but agrees with it completely." It is unnecessarily unliteral. I do not know why he changes that.

Reader:

> For as the interpretation of nature consists in the examination of the history of nature, and therefrom deducing definitions of natural phenomena on certain fixed axioms, so Scriptural interpretation proceeds by the examination of Scripture, and inferring the intention of its authors as a legitimate conclusion from its fundamental principles. By working in this manner everyone will always advance without danger of error—that is, if they admit no principles for interpreting Scripture, and discussing its contents save such as they find in Scripture itself—and will be able with equal security to discuss what surpasses our understanding, and what is known by the natural light of reason. (*TPT*, chap. 7)

LS: Let us stop here for a moment. So the crucial point is [that] the method of interpreting Scripture is identical with the method of interpreting nature. We must see what he means by that.[17] [We must emphasize] one conclusion which he makes. Since everyone can use this method, everyone can understand the Bible and can understand even the supernatural elements in the Bible, because this method is omnicompetent regarding the Bible [just] as it is omnicompetent regarding nature. Yes?

Student: He tells us to use only principles found in Scripture, but when he comes to the principles he tells you to look for the history, the context.

LS: No, no. He makes here a distinction between—that we will see in the sequel—between the history and the interpretation. The history is merely the collection of material. Just as if you want to analyze, say, thunder, you must have observations and preferably a variety of observations. Otherwise[18] you mistake this thunder which happens now and think it has all the characteristics which thunder could conceivably have. So history goes first, and then after you have the facts complete, you ascend from the facts to the reasons. Something of this kind Spinoza says has to be done regarding the Bible. You start from the history, whatever history may mean there, but it is clearly some collecting. Then you ascend from that to the causes; that means to the definition[s]. To anticipate what he will say later: [if] you want to know what the Bible teaches about divine love, you collect all passages dealing with love, and if you find an uncontroverted teaching regarding love going through the whole Bible, then you know that to be the teaching of the Bible, and then you can define precisely what the Bible understands by divine love. That does not necessarily mean that [that] is the true teaching regarding divine love, only the biblical teaching. But we are now concerned with the more general question: Why is the method of interpreting the Bible identical with the method of interpreting nature? That is not yet clear. Let us read the sequel.

Reader:

> In order to make clear that such a method is not only correct, but is also the only one advisable, and that it agrees with that employed in interpreting nature, I must remark that Scripture very often treats of matters which cannot be deduced from principles known to reason: for it is chiefly made up of narratives and revelation—

LS: That's the reason: because the Bible is unintelligible to the natural light, it must be treated by the natural light only. How strange. And yet Spinoza means something by that. The Scripture is unintelligible, therefore it must be treated like nature. But nature is intelligible and the Bible is not intelligible, so an entirely different method would seem to be necessary. Or what does Spinoza have in mind? Or is nature perhaps also unintelligible? In a sense, yes; namely, intelligibility in terms of purposes. And that of course is what Spinoza denies. And there is a not identical but[19] similar unintelligibility in the Bible, which has not the reason of [the] non-teleological but another reason. We anthropomorphize nature. We make it human, intelligible, and that is a way for never understanding nature. We must deanthropomorphize nature. We must see nature in its alienness to us. *That* is to understand nature. The same is true of the Bible. We must leave it in its unintelligibility; we must not artificially make it rational, otherwise we will not understand the Bible. That is the point of comparison. Let us read the immediate sequel.

Reader:

> the narratives generally contain miracles—that is, as we have shown in the last chapter, relations of extraordinary natural occurrences adapted to the opinions and judgment of the historians who recorded them: the revelations also were adapted to the opinions of the prophets, as we showed in Chap. II., and in themselves surpassed human comprehension. Therefore the knowledge of all these—that is, of nearly the whole contents of Scripture, must be sought from Scripture alone, even as the knowledge of nature is sought from nature.

LS: That I think makes it a bit clearer, what he said in the preceding paragraph. Scripture is alien to the human mind, as alien as in another way nature is. Therefore we must not treat them anthropomorphically. Anthropomorphically means, in the case of nature, teleologically; in the case of the Bible, as a purely rational document. Euclid or any other rational book can be read without any special method, because that is akin to the rational mind. Artificial methods are required only in proportion to the unintelligibility of the book. There is of course an element of truth in it if it is regarded as an empirical question. For reading a column in the *Daily News* or the *Sun Times*[vii] or whatever it may be you do not need any artificial preparation. We know the language; we know the problems with which they deal. We know probably also the bias of the columnist. So no research, and therefore no method, is needed for understanding them. But if you have to read the equivalent of a column written in the fourteenth century in Spain, you surely would need a method because of the alienness of it, the alien character of it. You have to find out first what these people were talking about, what the situation was. But we do not know. So the more intelligible, the nearer to your mind, the less the need of method. Now if there should be truly eternal truths essentially belonging to the human mind, no method, no artificial method would be needed for seeing that truth. There might be a method needed in order to free them from the artificial opinions which cover them. That's another matter.

[vii] Chicago newspapers of the time.

In other words, Scripture is as alien to the human mind—miracles, prophecies, etc.—[are] as alien to the rational mind as nature. That is the reason why—yes?

Student: I don't see how nature is at all alien to the human mind, because just as Scripture has these revelations and miracles, nature does not. Nature is completely rational. The whole principle of nature is completely rational.

LS: In a different way. Therefore I use the term anthropomorphize. Nature is not natural in the sense—what does it mean, acting rationally? With a view to an end, with a view to a good. Nature doesn't have such an end. If the Bible has a view to the good, this good, according to Spinoza, is not the rational good.

Student: But I am not sure that for Spinoza acting rationally is acting teleologically.

LS: Oh, yes, I think that is so. The question is: Where does the end come from in Spinoza? But that we must have an end, a norm, with a view to acting well, he says very clearly.

Student: What is natural, then, is [that] what is right would follow necessarily. This doesn't mean that it must act teleologically.

LS: No, but I ask you again what he means by this sentence which we read before, when he says "Therefore the knowledge of almost everything contained in Scripture must be taken from Scripture alone, just as knowledge of nature must be taken from nature itself." There must be some parallelism to that.[20]

Student: If you treat the Bible in the [completely] literal sense and find out that it is in conflict with reason, but if you treat the Bible according to the principles of reason, which he does all the way through . . .

LS: According to which principles of reason? Spinoza almost says here the largest part of the Bible is as unintelligible as what a shaman priest in northern Siberia says. Let us not fool ourselves: that is what he means. Therefore you have to treat it like other things which are brute facts in themselves, unintelligibles, and Spinoza is sure that he can give a rational explanation of any human irrationality, just as he can give a rational explanation of any brute fact of nature. What we have to think of is another kind of phenomenon, namely, intelligible books. You know the phrase was very common in the sixteenth, seventeenth century, "to read the book of nature." But to read the book of nature requires different methods than to read books about the book of nature, like Galileo or Newton. Do you see the difference? To understand Newton or Galileo is something entirely different from understanding gravitation or whatever else it may be. Newton is already gravitation understood, whereas gravitation as gravitation is not yet gravitation understood. Therefore reason is really at home in Galileo [or Newton], if they are right[21]. Reason is not yet at home when confronted with the mere fact out of which the theory of gravitation was developed, and these brute facts out of which the theory of gravitation was developed are as crude according to Spinoza as anything contained in the majority of passages in the Bible. That is, I think, what he means. Mr. ____?

Student: He refers to Euclid. He says it is comprehensible because upon looking at it, its intention, its meaning, can be understood.

LS: Where is that?

Student: Page 113.

LS: Let us read that then.

Reader:

> Euclid, who only wrote of matters very simple and easily understood, can easily be comprehended by anyone in any language; we can follow his intention perfectly, and be certain of his true meaning, without having a thorough knowledge of the language in which he wrote; in fact, a quite rudimentary acquaintance is sufficient. We need make no researches concerning the life, the pursuits, or the habits of the author; nor need we inquire in what language, nor when he wrote, nor the vicissitudes of his book, nor its various readings, nor how, nor by whose advice it has been received.
>
> What we here say of Euclid might equally be said of any book which treats of things by their nature perceptible: thus we conclude that we can easily follow the intention of Scripture in moral questions, from the history we possess of it, and we can be sure of its true meaning. (*TPT*, chap. 7)

LS: Well, "meaning" in Latin is *mens*. In order to understand his "mind." But you can say of course that means what he intends. There is no intention in nature. There is no intelligible intention in the majority of biblical passages.

Student: Is there an intention in Euclid?

LS: Euclid intended to teach geometry, and not only is his overall intention intelligible but also the subdivisions. It is all intelligible. You must make a distinction between theories regarding nature, which as such are of course intelligible, and the natural phenomena out of which the theory comes. The natural phenomena as they present themselves first are chaos. You collect, order, and then you ascend from the ordered phenomena to the cause, expressed in a definition. That's old stuff. And similarly, Spinoza says, you order the historical material in the Bible, and you ascend to the definition, which definition is here called the definition of what the prophets intended. But this intention is not of itself so intelligible as the intention of Euclid because of the irrationality of the writers.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: Well, there is a deliberate ambiguity here. Spinoza says in one of his letters "I do not understand Scripture," which of course is only another way of saying "I regard the Bible as essentially absurd." You see, if someone says "A is B" and in the same breath "A is not B," in

one way you understand it of course, but in another way you cannot understand it. Is that not clear? An absurdity is an intelligible unintelligibility. That is what Spinoza means. You understand that it is unintelligible, namely, an absurdity.

Student: Would it be correct to say then that the principle of order is in the human mind, but not within nature?

LS: No, that would draw too great a—the whole discussion which we have, which Spinoza gives here is from his point of view rather external, provisional. Ultimately, from Spinoza's point of view nature is a perfect order.

Student: Natural law?

LS: Yes, but a natural law which is not teleological. But this order is not directly accessible to us. We have to work our way up toward it. In the second book of the *Ethics* he describes that. What we are confronted with is chaotic occurrences which are as such wholly unintelligible. We have to proceed methodically to find the order in the seemingly chaotic occurrences, but what confronts us first are chaotic occurrences from which we ascend. And the same regarding the Bible: we are confronted with chaotic things. In order to understand it, the idea[22] is this. Once we have understood what the prophets meant, in all matters except the moral it is absurd. Then we need an explanation of the absurdity in psychopathological terms. Spinoza would not deny that.[23] You know, even psychiatrists who examine us today first want to find out what the patient complains about in his own terms before they give an explanation, if I am correctly informed. In other words, at the end there would be a perfectly rational account, or a perfectly clear and distinct account in scientific terms of this particular error which characterized prophets. There is no question. But you can't begin there; the beginning would have to be first to establish the phenomena to be explained, i.e., the Bible. And this is so difficult, so infinitely more difficult than to understand Euclid, that a method is required because if you have a definition of the basic axioms, of a triangle, a circle, it is a matter of simple demonstration.

Student: It is the way the demonstration proceeds. In the one case, with Euclid, it is *a priori*, and in the other case it is *a posteriori*.

LS: But the Bible does not begin like Euclid, with setting down axioms and postulates and so on, and admissions. You have to do that work yourself. And in addition, these axioms and postulates do not have that evidence, Spinoza says, which in his opinion axioms and postulates have. I think Spinoza means that very literally. As a general doctrine of interpreting books, this of course is a wholly absurd doctrine, what Spinoza says. But he would say the justification is [that] if you are confronted with unintelligible books or with unintelligible parts of books, you cannot proceed, to begin with, in an understanding way. Later on in the nineteenth century, [in Germany and other countries], people made a distinction between two methods of science.[24] There are sciences which are explanatory proper, natural sciences; and then there are sciences which are understanding, and these are the sciences of man, of the human mind. The implication was [that] natural phenomena are not strictly speaking intelligible. For example, that heavy bodies should fall, the brute fact is so, universally so; but there is no intelligible necessity for that. But that man acts, is moved by reason, these things we understand from within. You have observed these

theories. An analogon, not the same of course, is implied in Spinoza. Intelligible books do not require any complicated scientific method. Only to the extent to which a book is unintelligible, only to that extent to which a book approaches unintelligent nature, do we need a special method. Yes?

Student: Science would supposedly give some pattern to nature.

LS: I try to begin with the most external fact. In a more precise way one could say, nature, at least to begin with, is completely chaotic and therefore we need a method.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: Read the appendix to the first part of the *Ethics*. Teleology is absurd. The Bible is, to begin with, chaotic; therefore we need a method. Euclid does not appear at first glance as chaotic. It is orderly and therefore it [is] immediately intelligible. But let us return to our immediate subject. The Bible, the largest part of the Bible, is unintelligible, which would seem to make the Bible a wholly worthless book. But then Spinoza adds a crucial qualification: the Bible is intelligible regarding the moral teaching, and therefore the Bible can retain its position as the most important book of popular edification. But he adds here immediately this point. The assertion that the Bible does contain the moral teaching must itself be proved, otherwise it would be a prejudice. But it can be proved only in one way, namely, out of the Bible itself, and therefore we come back to the most basic truth that the only method of understanding the Bible is out of the Bible itself. That the Bible or the prophets have the true moral teaching cannot be proved by miracles, for example. As we have seen in the last chapter, it can only be proved by morality. The conclusion of this argument: the Bible is intelligible to the extent to which it is moral; in all other points it is not intelligible. Therefore no dogma can use the Bible, because every dogmatic assertion is contradicted by some other dogmatic assertion. That is roughly what he is driving at. We come back to that later when he takes that up.

Now[25] [the] other similarity between the study of Scripture and the study of nature is that both consist of history and definition. Let us read that. That is not very far from where we were: page 100, bottom.

Reader:

> Our knowledge of Scripture must then be looked for in Scripture only.
>
> Lastly, Scripture does not give us definitions of things any more than nature does—

LS: You see, Euclid gives definitions, Newton gives definitions; but nature does not give definitions, Scripture does not give definitions. Therefore they are equal. Yes?

Reader:

> therefore, such definitions must be sought in the latter case from the diverse workings of nature; in the former case, from the various narratives about the given subject which occur in the Bible.

> The universal rule, then, in interpreting Scripture is to accept nothing as an authoritative Scriptural statement which we do not perceive very clearly when we examine it in the light of its history. What I mean by its history, and what should be the chief points elucidated, I will now explain.

LS: Now he turns first to the history which is the provisional work, the collection of data. The second part is the definition or interpretation, which is the discovery of the laws, of the definitions. Now as for the history, it consists of three chief parts. One is knowledge of the Hebrew language. This is obviously true regarding the Old Testament. And the second, let us read that. Page 101, center.

Reader:

> An analysis of each book and arrangement of its contents under heads; so that we may have at hand the various text which treat of a given subject.

LS: Literally, "one must collect the opinions of every book, and reduce them to the highest heads." For example, the opinion, say, a remark about the power of God regarding the sea, that's a special case. Naturally he will reduce this to the head: the power of God in general. To the highest heads.

Reader:

> Lastly, a note of all the passages which are ambiguous or obscure, or which seem mutually contradictory.
>
> I call passages clear or obscure according as their meaning is inferred easily or with difficulty in relation to the context, not according as their truth is perceived easily or the reverse by reason. We are at work not on the truth of passages, but solely on their meaning. We must take especial care when we are in search of the meaning of a text, not to be led away by our reason in so far as it is founded on principles of natural knowledge (to say nothing of prejudices): in order not to confound the meaning of a passage with its truth, we must examine it solely by means of the signification of the words, or by a reason acknowledging no foundation but scripture. (*TPT*, chap. 7)

LS: Now let us stop here. Unfortunately we cannot read these things, because they need Spinoza's commentary. But the main point I think is clear. Since we approach the Bible without prejudice, without dogma, we do not assume that every biblical passage is true. Therefore we try to elicit the meaning of every biblical utterance as it is meant according to the literal meaning, and whether it is true or not in itself is an entirely different question. Spinoza says here only what we all do, [what we] all admit as a rule regarding other books where there is no question. If you want to find out what Aristotle says, I listen to what Aristotle says and try to understand it. Whether what Aristotle says is true is an entirely different question. In practice, the two questions always overlap, but in their meaning they are two entirely different questions. What does Aristotle teach? And is what he teaches true? Spinoza says, however, the same method must be applied to the Bible. Regarding all other books it was always granted; Spinoza takes the

revolutionary step of saying the same principle must be applied to the Bible. Now the third point which he makes is—that we should also read. The third point.

Reader:

> [III.] Lastly, such a history should relate the environment of all the prophetic books extant—

LS: What does he say? Environment? "This history must enumerate the happenings—the fates—of all books of the prophets." Environment is a nonsensical translation. *Casus*, "what happened to"; "the fate."

Reader:

> that is, the life, the conduct, and the studies of the author of each book, who he was, what was the occasion, and the epoch of his writing, whom did he write for, and in what language. Further, it should inquire into the fate of each book: how it was first received, into whose hands it fell, how many different versions there were of it, by whose advice was it received into the Bible, and, lastly, how all the books now universally accepted as sacred, were united into a single whole. All such information should, as I have said, be contained in the "history" of Scripture. (*TPT*, chap. 7)

LS: Then he gives the reason. But the main point is also that which is generally accepted, that you have to note these things. We usually take it for granted because there are some other fellows—"George did it."[viii] After all, there were men who had the patience to sit in monasteries and in libraries and collect the manuscripts, and find out which manuscripts are the most reliable, and to make a text which they regarded as good. And then in some cases the question arises: Is this book really by the author? Take Plato: quite a few dialogues are now regarded as spurious. Well, if they are spurious, they do not belong to the study of Plato proper, naturally. Don't forget these translations, because most of us cannot read these books because[26] [we] don't know the languages. This surely belongs to it. In the case of the Bible, that is a new thing, or at least stated by Spinoza with unusual emphasis. The same methods of historical criticism must be applied to the Bible. Now in the case of the Bible, you see immediately the point. For example, you get a biblical report about a miracle, say, the revelation at Sinai. According to the traditional view, as you know, the five books of Moses were written by Moses, i.e., by a contemporary. More generally speaking, an eyewitness report has greater reliability than the report of someone who was no eyewitness. Now if the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, as Spinoza claims he can prove, that has a very great consequence. What is the authenticity of such a report? You see how important that issue is which he raises here. Mr. ____?

Student: But he does not, by gathering the history, in this sense examine the Bible.

LS: In other words, Spinoza says to begin with that the method of mineralogy is identical with the method of studying the Bible. He grossly exaggerates. But on the other hand, he had a good

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[viii] Strauss occasionally uses this phrase to suggest that an act is attributed to someone else, as in "I didn't do it" or as in "someone, we don't know who, did it."

reason for initially making this overstatement, and the reason was that which I tried to state, surely.

Student: Does he or doesn't he read and examine the Bible solely in its own terms?[27]

LS: To understand the Bible only by itself, that is his rule. Whether he can do it is a question. He admits later on that he does not get the knowledge of the Hebrew language from the Hebrew Old Testament but from other sources, naturally. That's clear; just as you don't learn Plato's Greek from Plato, that you get from a grammar. That one can say is a matter of course. That is trivial. But you are driving after bigger game.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: It is not sufficient to say that according to Spinoza the Bible must be understood out of the Bible, just as nature must be understood solely out of nature, because the distinction between history and interpretation also applies equally to the Bible and to nature. And that is not sufficient, as is indicated by the fact that the method of reading Euclid is entirely different from the method of reading the Bible. I don't think you can avoid that, but think it over. And don't forget this point that neither nature nor the Bible sets forth definitions, whereas Euclid sets forth definitions. That is a real difference.

Student: That I see. Yes, and in that respect certainly it is almost like Baconian induction.

LS: Very good. The influence of Bacon's method on Spinoza is, [or at least was][28], quite well known. I do not know whether that is still remembered, and it certainly would deserve a careful study. The problem of induction in Bacon was to some extent accepted by Spinoza and shows here too. That's correct. Now then we turn to the question of the interpretation of Scripture as distinguished from the history. Now here we come to the more central issues, on page 104 in your translation. "But for this also the method and order required is similar to that which we use for interpreting nature out of the history of nature. For as in investigating natural things we try to investigate above everything else." Do you have that? Read it.

Reader:

> As in the examination of natural phenomena we try first to investigate what is most universal and common to all nature—such, for instance, as motion and rest, and their laws and rules, which nature always observes, and through which she continually works—and then we proceed to what is less universal; so, too, in the history of Scripture, we seek first for that which is most universal, and serves for the basis and foundation of all Scripture, a doctrine, in fact, that is commended by all the prophets as eternal and most profitable to all men. For example, that God is one, and that He is omnipotent, that He alone should be worshipped, that He has a care for all men, and that He especially loves those who adore Him and love their neighbor as themselves, &c. These and similar doctrines, I repeat, Scripture everywhere so clearly and expressly teaches, that no one was ever in doubt of its meaning concerning them. (*TPT*, chap. 7)

LS: And so on. Let us stop at this point. You see, the method is more special. After we have made our collection of data, either from nature or from the Bible, we turn then to the highest principles—in the case of nature, motion and rest—and then we descend from these universal rules regarding motion and rest in general to any particular case and specification of motion and rest. We also, on the basis of our collection of biblical data, ascend to the most universal—what[29] the Bible universally teach[es] everywhere—and we descend from that to the peculiar teachings of the Bible, to the most specific teachings. And here we see [that] Spinoza claims there is a complete biblical theology, a speculative teaching which is never controverted in the Bible. Is this not strange? You remember in the second chapter he had denied that there is a theoretical teaching running uncontroverted through the whole Bible. Here he says this. He asserts the contrary. That creates a great difficulty for him, because if there is an uncontroverted speculative teaching of the Bible, he cannot, without openly rejecting the Bible, reject that teaching. He cannot assert the Bible is useful only for moral purposes if it contains a speculative teaching. Is that not clear? Now let us see how he gets out of this difficulty. A little bit later, where you left off:

> After this universal doctrine of Scripture has been properly understood, one must then proceed to other things which are less universal, and which yet are concerned with the common use of life and which flow from that universal doctrine as rivulets. Of this kind are all external, particular acts of virtue which cannot be exercised except on a given occasion.[ix]

So in other words, there is a special moral teaching (he gives some examples) which follows from this principle. Tentatively we might suggest this. When Spinoza says the Bible has only a moral teaching, period, he implies that it contains the necessary theoretical premises of that moral teaching and that these necessary theoretical premises are those which he enumerated here, and we must see later on whether this is truly sufficient as an explanation. And now he gives an explanation of what he means. And that is an extremely interesting example. Let us read that. [page 104].

Reader:

> For instance, when Christ says, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," we do not know from the actual passage, what sort of mourners are meant; as, however, Christ afterwards teaches that we should have care for nothing, save only for the kingdom of God and His righteousness, which is commended as the highest good (Matt. vi. 33), it follows that by mourners He only meant those who mourn for the kingdom of God and righteousness neglected by man: for nothing but the Divine kingdom and justice, and who evidently despise the gifts of fortune.

LS: You see? In other words, he suggests a radical spiritualization of Christianity, by no means necessarily the meaning of the verse itself. You see, because he interprets this verse in the light of a neighboring verse, he thinks that is the correct message. But that is not the interesting example; the interesting example is that which follows.

[ix] Strauss's translation.

Reader:

> So, too, when Christ says: “But if a man strike you on the right cheek, turn to him the left also,” and the words which follow.
>
> If He had given such a command, as a lawgiver, to judges, He would thereby have abrogated the law of Moses, but this He expressly says He did not do (Matt. v. 17).

LS: Hence, “do not resist evil” is not a law. And according to the Catholic doctrine, if I remember well, it is a counsel, not a law. Up to this point it seems to be tolerable. But now let us see how he goes on. [Page 105.]

Reader:

> Wherefore we must consider who was the speaker, what was the occasion, and to whom were the words addressed.

LS: So Spinoza will show by this example that you have to consider the time and circumstances in order to see—[x]

Reader:

> Now as such teaching was only set forth by the prophets in times of oppression, and was even then never laid down as a law; and as, on the other hand, Moses (who did not write in times of oppression, but—mark this—strove to found a well-ordered commonwealth), while condemning envy and hatred of one’s neighbour, yet ordained that an eye should be given for an eye, it follows most clearly from these purely Scriptural grounds that this precept of Christ and Jeremiah concerning submission to injuries was only valid in places where justice is neglected, and in a time of oppression, but does not hold good in a well-ordered state.
>
> In a well-ordered state where justice is administered everyone is bound, if he would be accounted just, to demand penalties before the judge (see Lev. v. 1), not for the sake of vengeance (Lev. xix. 17, 18), but in order to defend justice and his country’s laws, and to prevent the wicked rejoicing in their wickedness. All this is plainly in accordance with reason.

LS: With natural reason.

Reader:

> I might cite many other examples in the same manner, but I think the foregoing are sufficient to explain my meaning and the utility of this method, and this is all my present purpose. (*TPT*, chap. 7)

LS: You see. But he is after bigger game, not only to show the usefulness of his method. He solves here the greatest difficulty which he has as a writer on politics, and it is meant to be based

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[x] The tape was changed at this point.

on the New Testament. How can he solve the problem created by the counsel or command against resisting evil? Well, he says, that is not meant universally but applies only to people without a state, in the state of oppression. The universal rule is: Resist evil. And Moses, who was concerned with the establishment of a good republic, taught: Resist evil. That is a rational teaching. The other teaching is rational only under special circumstances, i.e., universalized, it is not rational. So you see the connection between that remark and the passage we read last time that there is justice only where just men rule. When just men do not rule there is no hope for justice, and then the simplest thing is not to resist evil, not to care for justice. That is the way in which he solves that.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: Let us assume that you have a highly corrupt civil service, highly corrupt judiciary. Well, the only thing is to avoid these institutions because you can be sure you will be framed.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: All right. Then someone will say: Well, you defend yourself, but this fellow has a corrupt police force on his side. What then? The best thing is to give in. Of course I think Spinoza knew that was a misinterpretation of the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount. But what he wanted was for his purpose to present a seemingly tolerable interpretation of that remark in order to solve the problem of "do not resist evil." In this respect he is more in agreement with Moses than with the New Testament.

Now let us continue where we left off. The next passage is also very important. "The other things which occur in the Bible." [Page 106.]

Reader:

> The purely speculative passages cannot be so easily traced to their real meaning: the way becomes narrower, for as the prophets differed in matters speculative among themselves, and the narratives are in great measure adapted to the prejudices of each age, we must not, on any account, infer the intention of one prophet from clearer passages in the writings of another; nor must we so explain his meaning, unless it is perfectly plain that the two prophets were at one in the matter.

LS: Now let us stop here for one moment. You see here he specifies now the rule (he has done this before, but we hadn't spoken of it): the Bible must be understood only on the [basis of the] Bible. If a biblical assertion contradicts reason, you have no right to say: You must interpret it metaphorically. He discusses this at great length later. But not only that: you cannot even impute to one biblical writer the opinions of another biblical writer. Why could two different prophets or apostles not have very different opinions about a theologically important matter? On the basis of the tradition, that is impossible, because as a document of revelation the Bible cannot contradict itself in any important part. But once we question the premise, the orthodox premise, then we must be open to the possibility that the Bible does contradict itself. Needless to say, in later times that became trivial. All the people today who speak of the critical history of the Bible having

been compiled from sources which emerged in entirely different centuries in entirely different parts of the population take it for granted that they contradict each other. As a matter of fact, the contradictions are the starting point for any such analysis of the Bible, the Old Testament in particular. But the other point is of a broader importance. Here he says [that] regarding purely speculative matters, the Bible is obscure. I conclude from this that these dogmas he mentioned before—that God is unique and omnipotent, he alone is to be worshipped, and he cares for all, and so on—that they are not purely speculative from Spinoza's point of view. They are only the implications of the moral teaching; they are not speculative teachings proper. Otherwise I think we cannot solve this difficulty. Now let us read the sequel, what Spinoza does understand by purely speculative subjects. [Page 106.]

Reader:

> How we are to arrive at the intention of the prophets in such cases I will briefly explain. Here too, we must begin from the most universal proposition, inquiring first from the most clear Scriptural statements what is the nature of prophecy or revelation, and wherein does it consist; then we must proceed to miracles, and so on to whatever is most general till we come to the opinions of a particular prophet, and, at last, to the meaning of a particular revelation, prophecy, history, or miracle.

LS: Let us stop here. So you see these are the speculative problems, not what the Bible teaches regarding God, as he indicated before. These are the implications of the moral teaching, but what is prophecy or revelation, what is a miracle, these things are the purely speculative teaching which are so obscure. Now we cannot possibly read everything. He turns soon afterwards to the problem of tradition. The point is this. Theoretically it might be possible that there was a living tradition going back to the prophets and to the apostles, which, as a living tradition going back to the origin of the text, would be the authoritative interpreter. [But] that Spinoza denies. There is no living tradition which can claim to be the authoritative interpretation, neither in Judaism nor in Christianity.

Then he turns to more detailed considerations regarding the history of the Bible. For example, regarding [the] Hebrew language, especially that caused by the Hebrew letters, the history of the individual biblical books, and especially the fact that the originals are lost in some cases—in the case of the Gospels, and in the case of the letter to the Hebrews (of which he takes for granted that it was written originally in Hebrew), and of the book of Job, in the Old Testament, where he is not sure whether it was not originally written in a different language, and this is the source of the famous difficulties of the book of Job. If you turn to page 110, bottom.

Reader:

> It is useless to hope for a way out of our difficulties in the comparison of various parallel passages (we have shown that the only method of discovering the true sense of a passage out of many alternative ones is to see what are the usages of the language), for this comparison of parallel passages can only accidentally throw light on a difficult point, seeing that the prophets never wrote with the express object of explaining their own phrases or those of other people, and also

> because we cannot infer the meaning of one prophet or apostle by the meaning of another—

LS: You see this casual mention of the apostles.[30] [Spinoza] somehow or other makes it clear that what[31] [he] says explicitly about the Old Testament applies from his point of view of course to the New Testament as well. There can be no question about that.

I think we read only two more passages. One is on page 116, the second paragraph.

Reader:[xi]

> There only remains to examine the opinions of those who differ from me. The first which comes under our notice is, that the light of nature has no power to interpret Scripture, but that a supernatural faculty is required for the task. What is meant by this supernatural faculty I will leave to its propounders to explain. Personally, I can only suppose that they have adopted a very obscure way of stating their complete uncertainty about the true meaning of Scripture . . .
>
> The opinion of Maimonides was widely different. He asserted that each passage in Scripture admits of various, nay, contrary, meanings; but that we could never be certain of any particular one till we knew that the passage, as we interpreted it, contained nothing contrary or repugnant to reason. If the literal meaning clashes with reason, though the passage seems in itself perfectly clear, it must be interpreted in some metaphorical sense. (*TPT*, chap. 7)

LS: The context: he is discussing in the last section two alternative views. The first is [that] the Bible cannot be understood by the natural light, by human reason acting on nature alone, but there is need for the Holy Ghost. The doctrine as stated by Spinoza is the Calvinist doctrine. That he rejects. And then as a second possibility, [that] the Bible must be understood by the natural light alone, but in such a way that the natural light gives you the meaning of the Scripture, [such that] whenever a biblical proposition is irrational, it cannot be the true meaning. Here he refers to Maimonides. And Maimonides's doctrine can be simply stated as follows, very general[ly][32]. Since God is the author of the Bible as well as of reason, and God cannot contradict himself, no statement of the Bible can be against reason. Therefore, if there is a non-rational statement of the Bible we have to interpret it in the light of reason. And in this context he makes the remark to which I referred, and which you will read now.

Reader:

> If such a theory as this were sound, I would certainly grant that some faculty beyond the natural reason is required for interpreting Scripture. For nearly all

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[xi] According to the original transcript, Strauss remarked that the reader should start from page 116, second paragraph, and the original transcriber simply put the first sentence of that paragraph without an indication of where the reader concluded. There are two problems with this: 1) Strauss's comments following the reading appear to refer back to page 114, second paragraph (although we don't know exactly where they started and stopped). 2) The next reading, which starts slightly lower in the transcript, does read from page 116 second paragraph, strongly indicating that that wasn't what was read here. I have taken my best guess as to what was read based on Strauss's comments that immediately follow.

> things that we find in Scripture cannot be inferred from known principles of natural reason, and, therefore, we should be unable to come to any conclusion about their truth, or about the real meaning and intention of Scripture, but should stand in need of some further assistance.
>
> Further, the truth of this theory would involve that the masses, having generally no comprehension of, nor leisure for, detailed proofs, would be reduced to receiving all their knowledge of Scripture on the authority and testimony of philosophers, and, consequently, would be compelled to suppose that the interpretations given by philosophers were infallible.
>
> Truly this would be a new form of ecclesiastical authority, and a new sort of priests or pontiffs, more likely to excite men's ridicule than their veneration.

LS: In other words, the possibility of philosopher kings is so crazy that it can be dismissed completely. Now why does he say that? He says that[33] [that would be] a necessary implication of Maimonides, because if reason has to decide about the meaning of biblical passages, then those whose sole business was to cultivate reason, the philosophers, are the interpreters of the Bible. And since the light of the many depends on[34] biblical guidance, i.e., on the interpretation of the Bible, then the true rulers would be the philosophers, and that is preposterous because the vulgar would only be willing to accept the rule of priests and would never consider for one moment the rule of philosophers. That is quite interesting because it is, I think, the only reference of Spinoza to the problem of the philosopher kings, that is a simple absurdity. And now one more passage, on page 118, second paragraph, end, he takes up here again the question of the traditions. That is too long. Well, begin.

Reader:

> As to the tradition of the Pharisees, we have already shown that it is not consistent, while the authority of the popes of Rome stands in need of more credible evidence; the latter, indeed, I reject simply on this ground, for if the popes could point out to us the meaning of Scripture as surely as did the high priests of the Jews, I should not be deterred by the fact that there have been heretical and impious Roman pontiffs; for among the Hebrew high-priests of old there were also heretics and impious men who gained the high-priesthood by improper means, but who, nevertheless, had Scriptural sanction for their supreme power of interpreting the law.

LS: The main point which he makes is this. He wants to protect himself against an important legal consideration. Let us assume that the Bible is the established document, the law of the land. Then of course those authorized by the Bible to be the interpreters of the Bible are the interpreters, you see, because one thing is legal interpretation, and an entirely different thing is scientific interpretation, the purely theoretical interpretation. He discusses that and then he tries to show why this is impossible. The reasons come in the sequel. [Page 118.]

Reader:

> However, as the popes can show no such sanction, their authority remains open to very grave doubt, nor should anyone be deceived by the example of the Jewish high-priests and think that the Catholic religion also stands in need of a pontiff; he should bear in mind that the laws of Moses being also the ordinary laws of the country, necessarily require some public authority to insure their observance; for, if everyone were free to interpret the laws of his country as he pleased, no state could stand, but would for that very reason be dissolved at once, and public rights would become private rights.
>
> With religion the case is widely different. Inasmuch as it consists not so much in outward actions as in simplicity and truth of character, it stands outside the sphere of law and public authority. Simplicity and truth of character are not produced by the constraint of laws, nor by the authority of the state, no one the whole world over can be forced or legislated into a state of blessedness; the means required for such a consummation are faithful and brotherly admonition, sound education, and, above all, free use of the individual judgment. (*TPT*, chap. 7)

LS: And then he goes on with that. In religion, in contradistinction to external actions, everyone must be the judge. There cannot be authority in matters of the conscience, although Spinoza characteristically does not use the word "conscience" here. He says of religion: Everyone must be the judge. Why? What is the real reasoning of Spinoza which is not expressed here? Ultimately he argues from the opposite. If this were not admitted, if there were authorities in matters of religion, there could be compulsion in principle, direct or indirect, and persecution. The only way for abolishing that possibility is simply to assert [that] in matters of religion everyone must be the judge. Now as a political suggestion that is sensible under certain conditions, but the question is whether Spinoza, in his theoretical teaching of man and of civil society, gives a basis. You see, this follows from his interpretation of Scripture, which for him has no authority. But what does natural reason teach about the freedom of judgment of each? That is the question. We cannot answer that. That will be discussed on a purely rational basis in the twentieth chapter, but it is prepared by what precedes. We must, as I have said more than once, distinguish these two levels: the biblical level, which is of the greatest rhetorical importance from Spinoza's point of view but which[35] [is not truly his own], and the argument which is purely rational, which is his own argument.

So next time we will read and discuss a large sequence of chapters, chapters 8 through 11. These are the details of Spinoza's biblical criticism, which, while very interesting in themselves, are too much outside of our department[xii] to discuss at very great length, although it wouldn't do us any harm if we make clear to ourselves that our present situation—intellectual and therefore political—is based on the victory in the West of this criticism of the Bible. The older view according to which there is a simple and unqualified divinity of the Bible is today no longer universally accepted, to make an understatement, and a very great part of that was biblical criticism. And we have to devote some attention to this question. Rabbi ____,[xiii] you should know something about that problem. Perhaps you [will] tell us something about that. Think about

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[xii] The Political Science Department.

[xiii] Probably Rabbi Raymond Weiss, who took a number of Strauss's courses.

what are the really significant points, those which are really not of concern to specialists in any way but which have very broad and far-reaching consequences.

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1 Deleted “you said”
2 Deleted “of”
3 Deleted “**LS**: Oh, that’s what you meant? Student: That’s what I meant. Page 111 in this book. **LS**: Page 111, you say? Student: Paragraph 2.”
4 Deleted “the”
5 Deleted “Why is philosophy?”
6 Deleted “in this”
7 Deleted “it”
8 Deleted “had”
9 Deleted “also”
10 Deleted “that”
11 Deleted “between”
12 Deleted “the”
13 Deleted “Either”
14 Moved “more deeply”
15 Deleted “the”
16 Deleted “that”
17 Deleted “Only”
18 Deleted “you see only”
19 Deleted” a”
20 Deleted “Student: on the one hand if you treat the Bible as being completely literal. **LS**: As?”
21 Moved “or Newton”
22 Deleted “perhaps that is what Mr. __ has in mind”
23 Deleted “But that cannot begin before”
24 Moved “in Germany and other countries”
25 Deleted “this”
26 Deleted “they”
27 Deleted “That he surely needs. But with this crucial – Student: He does or does not?”
28 Deleted “was, at least, once”
29 Deleted “does”
30 Moved “he”
31 Moved “Spinoza”
32 Deleted “doctrine”
33 Deleted “is”
34 Deleted “the proper – on”
35 Deleted “has none of its own”

Session 7: no date

Leo Strauss: Now let us for a moment again remind ourselves why this subject discussed in these chapters and some of the chapters preceding is so important, even if we limit ourselves to the perspective of political science. The alternatives are these, as they appear from Spinoza. The view which he attacks [is that] the Bible is *the* Book—you know the word[i] Bible means "the book," i.e., the Divine Book, divinely inspired. And this divine inspiration of course affects also the wording, and affects naturally also the text as it has come down [to us]. Spinoza refers to the view that there was a special providence watching over the fate of the Bible. This book declares the will of God regarding the most important matters. A further implication is [that] there is only one[1] authoritative interpretation in all important matters. If not, the Bible could not be the guide. This view is of course of decisive political importance, namely, where it is adhered to, in spite of the fact pointed out by some people that in purely political matters, in matters of administration, Jethro was the teacher of Moses, which seems to indicate that matters of public administration are not subjects of divine inspiration, as I am sure you would all grant. But still you only have to think of such matters as marriage, divorce, and even the most general notions regarding property and duties of charity, to see how grave the political implications are. Even the more narrowly political problem, that of kingship or republicanism, was of course always affected by the authority of the Bible. There are the words of Deuteronomy where it is said "Thou shalt set a King above you," which was frequently understood to mean that God gives divine sanction to monarchy, to monarchy alone. This was of course contested also, but in all these discussions, for example in seventeenth-century England when the issue was between the republicans and the royalists, that was the key problem. They even went so far in this discussion, citing 1 Samuel against establishing a human king[2], [where Samuel] says the terrible things[3] [a king] will do: take away their girls and their property, and whatnot. And[4] [Samuel] says: Well, that is what a king is entitled to do. This, incidentally, was the traditional Jewish interpretation and was accepted by the extreme monarchists: the right of the king is unlimited. He is responsible to God, but he is not responsible to his subjects. Then the republicans of course said: No (which is nearer to the literal meaning of I Samuel 8), that was only a warning[5] [against establishing a] king, and the Bible is not a monarchistic document. But still that was at that time a very important teaching. However, one can say that was limited to certain periods and that is surely not the center of the biblical teaching. But it is clear that the whole notion of man's life and what his duty is is decisively determined by the Bible, i.e., by a belief in the divine origin of the Bible, the belief that the Bible is *the* Book.

The counterthesis, developed for the first time in public by Spinoza, is [that] the Bible is a human book. Purely human. And secondly, not a very impressive human book, to put it mildly. It abounds with imaginations and prejudices of a people who had nothing to do with philosophy. And in addition, apart from this fact [that] as a book it is not a particularly good book, it is not well-ordered. The Bible is not a book written by one man but by many men, the authors being unknown, and the people who compiled the book were, for whatever reasons, not good compilers. They just put together what they found, and whether the different sources contradicted each other or whether their argument was a coherent argument did not concern them. Spinoza tacitly compares the Bible with, say, any Greek history, and he would say, as it were: Look how Herodotus or Thucydides writes, and compare the way in which the Bible jumps

[i] There is a blank space here in the transcript, perhaps indicating that a word or phrase was inaudible.

from one subject to the other. And in addition, the numbers of years, the chronology, is very defective. All these defects were of course always known, and the traditional commentators, especially the theologians, invested much effort in reconciling them. And Spinoza says that these reconciliations are in a way worse than the original flaws. That is roughly the point of view to which he is leading.

Now let us turn to the details, and first look at the title of chapter 8. It must be on page 119.

Reader:

> The authorship of the Pentateuch and the other historical books of the Old Testament.

LS: No. That is very badly translated. "Chapter 8. In which it is shown that the Pentateuch, and the Books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, and Kings are not apocryphal. It is inquired whether the writers of all of them were many, or only one, and who." Now the key word is "they were not [autographic]."[ii] That means they were apocryphal; they were not the original writings, but copies. The crucial implication of that is this: we do not have in the Bible contemporary records. There were contemporary records, for example, the chronicles of the Kings of Israel and Judah, but these were used by the biblical writers[6] [and] have been completely lost. No contemporary records. Now that of course is very crucial, if you remember the argument regarding miracles (I discussed this when we discussed chapter 6). At a certain point of the argument it becomes decisive for Spinoza that the miracles are known only as reported: we have no direct evidence of them. And then of course the question arises: How reliable are the reports? Are the miracles reported by eyewitnesses, or by people who were not eyewitnesses? That makes all the difference. And therefore the question especially regarding Moses, the contemporary of the greatest miracles in the Old Testament: Was he the author of the Pentateuch or was he not? If he was not, well, then you can only say the authors put down old stories circulating in the nation, and we have no possible way of finding out whether they have any basis in fact. That is the practical meaning of this argument. Now let us turn then to page 120, the second paragraph, where he states the problem.

Reader:

> In order to treat the subject methodically, I will begin with the received opinions concerning the true authors of the sacred books, and in the first place, speak of the author of the Pentateuch—

LS: May I say [that] he says here "the writer" in both cases. You remember the difficulty we had last time, that Spinoza prefers to speak of the writers and not of the authors. You know there is a difference, because even from the point of view of verbal inspiration, Moses would still be the writer but God would be the author. So let us be exact, because Moses is not the author of the Old Testament but the writer.

Reader:

[ii] The original transcript reads "they were not apocryphal." However, this would contradict what Strauss himself says immediately afterward. The Latin is *non esse autographa* and from context "autographic" appears to be the meaning Strauss intends.

> who is almost universally supposed to have been Moses. The Pharisees are so firmly convinced of his identity, that they account as a heretic anyone who differs from them on the subject. Wherefore, Aben Ezra, a man of enlightened intelligence, and no small learning, who was the first, so far as I know, to treat of this opinion, dared not express his meaning openly, but confined himself to dark hints which I shall not scruple to elucidate, thus throwing full light on the subject. (*TPT*, chap. 8)

LS: So in other words, what Spinoza says here is [that] he is not the first to doubt the authorship of Moses. He mentions only one, who according to his knowledge is the first: Ibn Ezra.[iii] That is late eleventh century. Rabbi, is that correct?

Student: I think so.

LS: In southern Spain somewhere. What Spinoza says is [that] there were others. For example, Hobbes[7] stated it quite clearly in his *Leviathan* in 1651, and others, but it was naturally not stated by many. And Ibn Ezra, as he indicates, did not dare to state it openly. Spinoza brings the whole issue into the open more than anyone else had done before him. We cannot go into the details. I believe that today by general Old Testament scholarship this is taken for granted, that Moses is not the author of the Pentateuch as we have it, and these arguments are some of the arguments which would be used today too, if I remember that well. As for his use of the word Pharisee, Pharisees mean of course the Jews, especially the Jewish scholars; and Spinoza does this partly in appealing to a Christian prejudice against the Pharisees. So if he would say the Pharisees are the only people vouching for that, that would be a poor argument in a discussion with Christians against it, but there is also another point in it. Prior to the emergence of Christianity there was this famous cleavage or conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Sadducees were those influenced by the Greeks, and enlightened. For example, they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. That was the key issue. So by opposing the Pharisees, Spinoza also creates some prejudice in favor of the Sadducees, with whom he naturally agrees more than with the Pharisees. This [much] about this cleavage.

Spinoza first states[8] the argument supplied by Ibn Ezra, and then he turns to his own argument. We cannot discuss that because we would have to go into details which we have no possibility[9] [of] discuss[ing] here usefully. Let us only consider the principle implied. Spinoza reads the Bible like any other book, and then he finds these strange remarks, for example, the description of Moses's funeral by Moses, which humanly speaking is absolutely impossible, naturally, but which would not be impossible on the basis of divine inspiration. Why could God not make use of his omnipotence in this way? Spinoza refers to this possibility, but he rejects it tacitly. What is the argument here, the tacit argument implied, if someone said God inspired Moses to describe Moses's own funeral?

Student: God has knowledge of future events.

[iii] Abraham ibn Ezra (1089?-1164?) was an important medieval commentator on Scripture, who also wrote on philosophy, astronomy, and poetry. His commentary was highly regarded by Maimonides. Spinoza's claim that Ibn Ezra denied Mosaic authorship is of course disputed.

LS: Sure. But what would Spinoza's objection be on this basis to this argument? Well, the question is: Is this a wise use of omnipotence? That would be the question. Is it not more worthy of God's wisdom not to change the order of nature unless it is absolutely necessary? There is no necessity. As you know, in the Jewish tradition, I think it was taken for granted; the last verses were said to have been written by Joshua, if I remember well.[iv] Spinoza's criticism is of course much more radical, although he does not develop that. The notion of verbal inspiration, which was a traditionally Jewish as well as a Protestant view (in Catholicism it is not so strict, but in Judaism it was very strict[10]) is this: What does it mean, God speaks? There can be no question of divine speech organs. Speech proper is impossible. The speech as speech, and therefore the writing as writing [inaudible][v] must be human. And therefore the question arises: The Bible, spoken by man, written by man, how can one be certain that this was meant by the inspiring God as it came out in human language? That is the question. Spinoza thinks that there is no way of settling the problem. You never get the pure intention of God, if one may say so, the non-spoken, non-speakable intention of God in a spoken word. There is always the human element in it, and we can never be certain of the divine element. After having discussed the arguments showing that the Pentateuch as we have it cannot have been written by Moses—needless to say, these individual things in themselves do not prove that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses; they would by themselves only prove that these particular passages could not have been written by Moses and could have been in a book stemming from Moses. That is not, in strict logic, settled by the fact that this particular passage is not by Moses. But I do not want to go into that. He raises then the question: Which were the books actually written by Moses? And in this connection we can read one passage, on page 125, line 4 following.

Reader:

> We hear also in Exod. xxiv. 4 of another book called the Book of the Covenant, which Moses read before the Israelites when they first made a covenant with God. But this book or this writing contained very little, namely, the laws or commandments of God which we find in Exodus xx. 22 to the end of chap. xxiv., and this no one will deny who reads the aforesaid chapter rationally and impartially. It is there stated that as soon as Moses had learnt the feeling of the people on the subject of making a covenant with God, he immediately wrote down God's laws and utterances, and in the morning, after some ceremonies had been performed, read out the conditions of the covenant to an assembly of the whole people.

LS: That is sufficient for our purpose. You see, that is what Spinoza implies, that the Book of the Covenant, two or three chapters in Exodus, that is the genuine statement. And that plays, I think, a role also in later biblical criticism. Goethe restored that view somewhere.[vi] And I think today that is very generally accepted, that this Book of the Covenant is one of the oldest strata of the Bible. And if one reads it well, under the spell of our present-day prejudices of what is archaic and what is not, it looks, it reads like an unusually archaic law, [a] law of simple people, simple

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[iv] In the Talmud (Bava Basra 15a) this opinion that Joshua wrote the final eight verses is offered, but the contrary opinion of Mosaic authorship is also given, and the latter is usually taken as the Orthodox position.

[v] There is a blank space in the transcript, perhaps indicating an inaudible word or phrase.

[vi] Strauss may be referring to Goethe's essay "*Israel in der Wüste*" (1819).

human beliefs. There is very little of priestly material; [rather], the needs of a simple society, with a kind of paternal tribal morality. The implications of course of this remark here is that the Decalogue, which precedes this section, is not by Moses, an argument which he takes up later on in this chapter on page 131.

Let us take another point which throws light on the general question, on page 126 at the end of the first paragraph.

Reader:

> As, then, we have no proof that Moses wrote any book save this of the covenant, and as he committed no other to the care of posterity; and, lastly, as there are many passages in the Pentateuch which Moses could not have written, it follows that the belief that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch is ungrounded and even irrational.

LS: Do you see something, an assumption which Spinoza makes and to which he is not entitled ultimately? His argument is based on the historical reliability of the Bible. Traditionally, the Pentateuch was thought to be by Moses. That of course is never said in the Pentateuch, that Moses has written these five books. So he looks in the book, in the five books of the Pentateuch. What did he, Moses write? What did Moses himself write? And he takes this as reliable historical evidence. That of course would require a much longer analysis, whether these reports or stories that Moses wrote this particular thing, are really reliable, but Spinoza would say—he argues *ex concessis*, things which his adversaries must grant him, but which from his own point of view he doesn't have to grant, and has even no right to. But for his purposes of course, as far as it is merely polemical, that is sufficient. Now what appears then about the meaning of these parts of the Bible as a whole? Turn to page 128, paragraph 5.

Reader:

> We may, therefore, conclude that all the books we have considered hitherto are compilations—

LS: Literally apocryphal, copies. Not the originals.

Reader:

> and that the events therein are recorded as having happened in old time. Now if we turn our attention to the connection and argument of all these books, we shall easily see that they were all written by a single historian, who wished to relate the antiquities of the Jews from their first beginning down to the first destruction of the city. The way in which the several books are connected one with the other is alone enough to show us that they form the narrative of one and the same writer. (*TPT*, chap. 8)

LS: Note this "Jewish antiquities," and nothing else. The claim generally raised, that the Bible contains the ancient history of mankind, is not borne out by the text critically read. It is a Jewish historian who describes the history of the Jews from their beginning and links it up with some general stories about the origin of the human race altogether, and the emergence of the Jewish

people. But that is as valuable from Spinoza's point of view as the stories of the beginning at Livy's history about the founding of Rome.[vii] There may be an element of truth in them, but we will never be able to discern them. And the conclusion is, then: the author of this historical book, beginning from Genesis and leading up to the books [of] Kings, is probably Ezra. That is to say, that was written after the return from the Babylonian captivity—that is to say sixth century [BCE], much later than the traditional view. Now let us first go over the points in the next chapter. Page 133, second paragraph.

Reader:

> The cause (if it were not untimely death) which prevented him from completing his work in all its portions, I cannot conjecture, but the fact remains most clear, although we have lost the writings of the ancient Hebrew historians, and can only judge from few fragments which are still extant. For the history of Hezekiah (2 Kings xviii. 17), as written in the vision of Isaiah, is related as it is found in the chronicles of the kings of Judah. We read the same story, told with few exceptions in the same words, in the book of Isaiah which was contained in the chronicles of the kings of Judah (2 Chron. xxxii. 32). From this we must conclude that there were various versions of this narrative of Isaiah's, unless, indeed, anyone would dream that in this, too, there lurks a mystery. (*TPT*, chap. 9)

LS: You see here the appeal of common sense. In reading the Bible you come across problems of text, difficulties of text, of the variant readings or whatever it may be, which you see in all other books. Why should not the same things have happened to the Bible which have happened in Plato and Thucydides or any other writer? The traditional view was from the premise that the Bible is not a book like any other book, and therefore these problems must all be solved in a different way. But Spinoza says: Why? It is a book, and hence certain fundamental principles applying to all books must be equally applied to that [rather than] engaging in fantastic speculations. Now let us turn to page 135, where he summarizes his opinion.

Reader:

> There is no need that I should go through the whole Pentateuch. If anyone pays attention to the way in which all the histories and precepts in these five books are set down promiscuously and without order with no regard for dates; and further, how the same story is often repeated, sometimes in a different version, he will easily, I say, discern that all the materials were promiscuously collected and heaped together, in order that they might at some subsequent time be more readily examined and reduced to order.

LS: But they were not brought into order by the compilers; for some reason that was not done. Spinoza speaks of that later. The Bible is a poor compilation, that is the point Spinoza makes throughout. He indicates on some occasions that there is an alternative interpretation possible, which he rejects. That it was a collection made, that is clear, but it was a collection made reverently. They rather preferred to have a mere juxtaposition of two different reports than to tamper with that. The compilers looked at the sources, or part of the sources, which they used as texts deserving reverence; and therefore it was not stupidity or ineptness but reverence. Spinoza

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[vii] Titus Livius, or Livy (59BCE-17CE), Roman historian and author of *History of Rome*.

refers to that—he regards this even as plausible—but he rejects this as devotion of old women. The sensible man would not have such a reverence for a text. He would only select certain parts, then go beyond it and make it an integral part of the book, and not leave the traces of the originals. Let us then read on page 139, line 4 following.

Reader:

> For instance, when it is said in 2 Chronicles, that Ahab was forty-two years old when he began to reign, they pretend that these years are computed from the reign of Omri, not from the birth of Ahab. If this can be shown to be the real meaning of the writer of the book of Chronicles, all I can say is that he did not know how to state a fact.

LS: More literally, that he did not know how to speak. Because no one would say X was so many years old unless he refers to the time elapsed between the birth and the time of which he is writing. Go on.

Reader:

> The commentators make many other assertions of this kind, which if true, would prove that the ancient Hebrews were ignorant both of their own language, and of the way to relate a plain narrative. I should in each case recognize no rule or reason in interpreting Scripture, but it would be permissible to hypothesize to one's heart's content.
>
> If anyone thinks that I am speaking too generally, and without sufficient warrant, I would ask him to set himself to showing us some fixed plan in these histories which might be followed without blame by other writers of chronicles, and in his efforts at harmonizing and interpretation, so strictly to observe and explain the phrases and expressions, the order and the connections, that we may be able to imitate these also in our writings. If he succeeds, I will at once give him my hand, and he shall be to me as great Apollo; for I confess that after long endeavors I have been unable to discover anything of the kind. I may add that I set down nothing here which I have not long reflected upon, and that, though I was imbued from my boyhood up with the ordinary opinions about the Scriptures, I have been unable to withstand the force of what I have urged. (*TPT*, chap. 9)

LS: That is an interesting autobiographical remark. He says: I know the traditional view as well as you do; I have been brought up in that. And this book, these sections are a kind of summary of things which he had collected and thought through in his very early period. There are other references of this kind. The somewhat cavalier way in which he treats the subject in the Old Testament (the New Testament is a different story) is due to the fact that he really[11] was so satisfied with his youthful reading and the result of it that he frequently did not take the trouble of looking up the old thoughts again and relied on his youthful findings. I think in a negative way Spinoza states the problem of interpreting the Old Testament well. If we approach the Bible as a book in the strict sense, meaning as a Greek book, because as far as we know the Greeks were the first to write books—I don't know the Chinese books or the Hindu books—but the Greeks really had a very clear notion of what a book is and developed that. If we approach the Bible like

a Greek book, I think we can understand that. And Spinoza applies here these standards. Try to write a book according to what you have learned in school about composition and so on, and you will never do it in the way in which the Bible does it. Of course not. That is quite true. The paradoxical fact is—and that is wholly independent of Spinoza's opinion—is that the Bible, which is called The Book, is not a book in the way in which we learn what a book is from the theorists of books, the Greeks, and that presents a very great problem. And I would say that this statement is entirely independent of the theological problem. Spinoza has no positive understanding of the way in which the biblical compilers compiled; that is for him just, as I said, devotion of old women, nothing more.

Now let us turn to the corruption of the text in particular, and let us read a few passages only. On page 140, second paragraph.

Reader:

> There are some people, however, who will not admit that there is any corruption, even in other passages, but maintain that by some unique exercise of providence God has preserved from corruption every word in the Bible: they say that the various readings are the symbols of profoundest mysteries, and that mighty secrets lie hid in the twenty-eight hiatus which occur, nay, even in the very form of the letters.

Now that of course played a very great role in mysticism, especially in Jewish mystical speculation. You see, he does not even discuss the possibility of special providence watching over the biblical text. Why? What is the argument, the tacit argument? Well, he would say the fact of textual corruption is so evident that it is a futile attempt to speak of special providence having watched over it. The fact refutes the theory.

There is another point on the same page, the end of the fourth paragraph, which has an autobiographical implication, as you will see.

Reader:

> I know that I have remarked other passages of the same kind, but I cannot recall them at the moment.

LS: You see how easygoing he is. In other words, he is so sure he has a command of the problem of the Bible that he does not even take the trouble of refreshing his memory. "I don't remember that." No scholar in our age would, I believe, have the courage to say such a thing. Page 141, paragraph 3.

Reader:

> Though these matters are self-evident, it is necessary to answer the reasonings of certain Pharisees, by which they endeavor to convince us that the marginal notes serve to indicate some mystery and were added or pointed out by the writers of the sacred books. The first of these reasons, which, in my opinion carries little weight, is taken from the practice of reading the Scriptures aloud.

> If it is urged, these notes were added to show various readings which could not be decided upon by posterity, why has custom prevailed that the marginal readings should always be retained? Why has the meaning which is preferred been set down in the margin when it ought to have been incorporated in the text, and not relegated to a side note? (*TPT*, chap. 9)

LS: Now let us stop here. You see from here the implication that Spinoza is not the first to take this view. He takes up a view existing prior to that. By trying to refute the Pharisees' refutation of a certain doctrine, he implies of course that this doctrine existed before his time. But Spinoza brings the whole issue into the open.

Now let us read a few more passages which are necessary for the argument, and then we will have a more general discussion. On page 146, first paragraph.

Reader:

> I now pass on to the remaining books of the Old Testament. Concerning the two books of Chronicles I have nothing particular or important to remark, except that they were certainly written after the time of Ezra, and possibly after the restoration of the Temple by Judas Maccabaeus. For in chap. ix of the first book we find a reckoning of the families who were the first to live in Jerusalem, and in verse 17 the names of the porters, of which two recur in Nehemiah. This shows that the books were certainly compiled after the rebuilding of the city. As to their actual writer, their authority, utility, and doctrine, I come to no conclusion. I have always been astonished that they have been included in the Bible by men who shut out from the canon the books of Wisdom, Tobit, and the others styled apocryphal. I do not aim at disparaging their authority, but as they are universally received I will leave them as they are. (*TPT*, chap. 10)

LS: You see, that is again a reference to the broader problem[12]. The problem of the authority of the biblical books is in fact at stake. What is the status of the transmitters? That problem is always present, because what we have in front of us (that is what Spinoza is suggesting) is not what the original writers wrote but what the transmitters transmitted, the compilers of the canon. That will come out more clearly in the rest of the chapter.[13] [Page 146.]

Reader:

> The Proverbs of Solomon were, I believe, collected at the same time, or at least in the time of King Josiah for in chap. xxv. 1, it is written, "These are also proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied out." I cannot here pass over in silence the audacity of the Rabbis who wished to exclude from the sacred canon both the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and to put them both in the Apocrypha. In fact, they would actually have done so, if they had not alighted on certain passage in which the law of Moses is extolled. It is, indeed, grievous to think that the settling of the sacred canon lay in the hands of such men; however, I congratulate them, in this instance, on their suffering us to see these books in question, though I cannot refrain from doubting whether they have transmitted them in absolute good faith; but I will not now linger on this point.

LS: In other words, he had in mind the problem [to] which Mr. ____ referred.[viii] The rabbis who compiled the Old Testament canon were of course aware of these difficulties, and there was therefore a discussion, and of this discussion there are some traces in the canon, to which Spinoza referred. But if these men, of whom one cannot claim that they were inspired in the way in which the prophets were inspired,[14] are responsible for what we have—even granting that the originals were sacred, through the transmission and the editing they lost the character which they might originally have had. [Page 153.]

Reader:

> Those, therefore, who explain these passages otherwise, deny the plain meaning of Scripture—nay, they deny Scripture itself. They think it pious to reconcile one passage of Scripture with another—a pretty piety forsooth, which accommodates the clear passages to the obscure, the correct to the faulty, the sound to the corrupt.
>
> Far be it from me to call such commentators blasphemers, if their motives are pure: for to err is human.

LS: You see, they had no intention to curse. They were not strictly speaking blasphemous.[15] Spinoza sees this much: that the traditional interpretation which he rejects was not due to simple stupidity and lack of knowledge of the rules of grammar and interpretation and so on but had a positive reason, namely, piety, reverence for the text. Spinoza's point is [that] it is not a reasonable piety to be pious regarding parchment and ink, as he puts it somewhere. That is a narrow piety which he must reject. Two more passages in this chapter, on page 154, the fourth paragraph.

Reader:

> Perhaps I shall be told that I am overthrowing the authority of Scripture, for that, according to me, anyone may suspect it of error in any passage; but, on the contrary —

LS: Do you see that point? If there is not special providence watching over the text, if in addition the text is corrupt or possibly corrupt in many cases, well, where can we stop? There is no principle because the most important passages may be corrupt. How does Spinoza answer that?

Reader:

> but on the contrary, I have shown that my object has been to prevent the clear and uncorrupted passages being accommodated to and corrupted by the faulty ones; neither does the fact that some passages are corrupt warrant us in suspecting all. No book ever was completely free from faults, yet I would ask, who suspects all books to be everywhere faulty? Surely no one, especially when the phraseology is clear and the intention of the author plain.

[viii] Presumably one of the students who had read a paper.

LS: In other words, no serious danger comes, especially since the principle, of which he will make great use in the next four chapters, that [in] the crucially important passages, those regarding conduct, no errors have crept in. For example, there has never been any question about the fact that the Bible forbids theft or murder. These passages are not corrupted. And Spinoza would say that is no accident, because these things are so simple that they could never be an object of any doubt by any scribe, however stupid or superstitious he might be. And then on page 155, the second paragraph.

Reader:

> I have now finished the task I set myself with respect to the books of the Old Testament. We may easily conclude from what has been said, that before the time of the Maccabees there was no canon of sacred books, but that those which we now possess were selected from a multitude of others at the period of the restoration of the Temple by the Pharisees (who also instituted the set form of prayers), who are alone responsible for their acceptance. Those, therefore, who would demonstrate the authority of Holy Scripture, are bound to show the authority of each separate book; it is not enough to prove the Divine origin of a single book in order to infer the Divine origin of the rest. In that case we should have to assume that the council of Pharisees was, in its choice of books, infallible, and this could never be proved. (*TPT*, chap. 10)

LS: Here he brings out very clearly what the issue is. The issue is the divinity—to translate it more literally, divinities—of the Bible, and therefore each individual book. And this depends on the divinity, authority of the compilers of the canon, because what preceded the canon is not accessible to us except in this canon collection. And that settles it. And so I think Spinoza leaves no doubt, in spite of the polemical language which he uses, that this is a very important objective which he has in mind in all this seemingly merely philological discussion. The authority of the Bible would depend, among other things, on the fact that the Bible is uniquely preserved, free from mistakes, corruption, and so on, and would also have to have this minimum of lucidity or clarity which we would expect especially of an historical part, and the Bible does contain historical parts. With these remarks, that is practically the end of his discussion of the Old Testament.

In the next chapter he turns to the New Testament, and there is only one chapter on the New Testament. He has an apology for that. This is the subject to which we have to turn now. Spinoza was solitary individual—[as was] Hobbes [and] a few [other] men of of this kind. There was a group of men, a kind of church or sect which played a considerable role in this half-rationalistic or rationalistic movement, and these were the Socinians.[ix] The Socinians, with whom Spinoza had some contact,[16] went very far in many respects. Now the Socinians were very rationalist[ic], which means they accepted the authority of the Bible on the basis of rational argument alone; say, for example, the miracles prove, demonstrate the authority of the Bible, and that is a fully valid demonstration and no other basis for the authority of the Bible is possible or necessary. But the Socinians believed that they could establish only in this way the authority of the New Testament. The authority of the Old Testament was in their opinion derivative from that of the New Testament. The New Testament vouches for the divine origin of the Old Testament. You

[ix] See session 2, n. v.

see, up to this point Spinoza remains somehow in—how shall I say it?—in some contact with the Socinian view that the Old Testament is not so terribly important, especially since the Socinians said the immortality of the soul is not taught in the Old Testament, only in the New, and so on. Now therefore the question is: What about the New Testament? There have been always people since olden times who had said the Old Testament has become completely obsolete by the New Testament. The key problem in a Christian world, which is of course more than a Christian [one], is the Old Testament. At least it is more massively the problem. Therefore we must see what Spinoza's attitude toward the New Testament is. To understand let us read first the title of chapter 11.

Reader:

> An inquiry whether the apostles wrote their epistles as apostles and prophets, or merely as teachers; and an explanation of what is meant by an apostle.

LS: Now what is the general answer?

Student: [inaudible]

LS: Therefore, what would be the conclusion? The New Testament has a much higher status than the Old Testament, because there is reason in the New Testament. The Old Testament is imagination. That is what he suggests. But you have a difficulty.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: We come to the details later, but only the main point. Now let us then turn to the end of chapter 10, when he says: Well, now it is time to examine the books of the New Testament also in the same manner. [Page 156.]

Reader:

> The time has now come for examining in the same manner the books in the New Testament; but as I learn that the task has been already performed by men highly skilled in science and languages, and as I do not myself possess a knowledge of Greek sufficiently exact for the task; lastly, as we have lost the originals of these books which were written in Hebrew, I prefer to decline the undertaking. However, I will touch on those points which have most bearing on my subject in the following chapter.

LS: So in other words, he will limit himself entirely to what is indispensable for his purpose. Now the books of the New Testament, he says; and what does the title say?

Student: Epistles of the Apostles.

LS: But is the New Testament identical with the Epistles of the Apostles?

Student: No, the Gospels too.

LS: That is the first sign we get. We must see what he does with the Gospels. We cannot read everything. Let us turn to page 159, paragraphs 2 to 4.

Reader:

> All the arguments employed by Moses in the five books are to be understood in a similar manner; they are not drawn from the armory of reason, but are merely modes of expression calculated to instill with efficacy, and present vividly to the imagination the commands of God.
>
> However, I do not wish absolutely to deny that the prophets ever argued from revelation; I only maintain that the prophets made more legitimate use of argument in proportion as their knowledge approached more nearly to ordinary knowledge, and by this we know that they possessed a knowledge above the ordinary, inasmuch as they proclaimed absolute dogmas, decrees, or judgments. (*TPT*, chap. 11)

LS: More literally, that they possess suprarational knowledge.

Reader:

> Thus Moses, the chief of the prophets, never used legitimate argument, and, on the other hand—

LS: You see, that he says in passing. That is of course a very malicious remark. The greater the prophet the less legitimate. He doesn't deny that Moses uses arguments, but not legitimate arguments. Therefore the Old Testament is in its own understanding based entirely on supranatural knowledge, but on the contrary . . . [x]

Reader:

> —the long deductions and arguments of Paul, such as we find in the Epistle to the Romans, are in nowise written from supernatural revelation.
>
> The modes of expression and discourse adopted by the Apostles in the Epistles, show very clearly that the latter were not written by revelation and Divine command, but merely by the natural powers and judgment of the authors. They consist in brotherly admonitions and courteous expressions such as would never be employed in prophecy—

LS: You see, that is also very nasty. The prophet is endowed with such a high authority, they cannot be courteous. Paul is courteous, and that proves that he was using only natural reason. The New Testament is rational. The Old Testament is allegedly suprarational, in fact, infrarational. To this passage which we just read there is a parallel toward the end of the seventh chapter, to which we might turn, on page 118, the fourth paragraph.

Reader:

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[x] It is likely that there was a break in the tape at this point.

> With religion the case is widely different. Inasmuch as it consists not so much in outward actions as in simplicity and truth of character, it stands outside the sphere of law and public authority. Simplicity and truth of character are not produced by the constraint of law, not by the authority of the state, no one the whole world over can be forced or legislated into a state of blessedness; the means required for such a consummation are faithful and brotherly admonition, sound education, and, above all, free use of the individual judgment. (*TPT*, chap. 7)

LS: Now if you literally put two and two together, if you put these two passages together, you see that according to this claim the Old Testament as such has nothing to do with religion, just [with] public laws. Only the New Testament has this character. Spinoza would exempt Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, as we know, the writings of Solomon, because they were merely based on natural reason and therefore they occupy a very special position. So up to now, it is a clear plea for the supremacy of the New Testament. Now let us see how the argument continues on page 160, the second paragraph.

Reader:

> Lastly, the prophets only preached what we are assured by Scripture they had received from God, whereas this is hardly ever said of the Apostles in the New Testament, when they went about to preach. On the contrary, we find passages expressly implying that the Apostles chose the places where they should preach on their own responsibility, for there was a difference amounting to a quarrel between Paul and Barnabas on the subject (Acts xv. 37, 38). Often they wished to go to a place, but were prevented, as Paul writes, Rom. i. 13, "Oftentimes I purposed to come to you, but was let hitherto;" and in 1 Cor. xvi.12, "As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren, but his will was not at all to come at this time: but he will come when he shall have convenient time."
>
> From these expressions and differences of opinion among the Apostles, and also from the fact that Scripture nowhere testifies of them, as of the ancient prophets, that they went by the command of God, one might conclude that they preached as well as wrote in their capacity of teachers, and not as prophets. (*TPT*, chap. 11)

LS: Let us stop here. That is what he had indicated in the title: the apostles were teachers, therefore reasoners and not prophets; they did not base their arguments on divine revelation. But you see also a reference, a provisional reference which will later on be reinforced, to the dissensions of the apostles. He will develop this later. Let us turn to the end, on page 161, line[s] 8 to 12.

Reader:

> We need not be deterred by the fact that all the Epistles begin by citing the imprimatur of the Apostleship, for the Apostles, as I will shortly show, were granted, not only the faculty of prophecy, but also the authority to teach.

LS: You see, he admits now that the apostles had the prophetic capacities but they had also the capacity of teaching. Now read the second paragraph.

Reader:

> As we have seen that the Apostles wrote their Epistles solely by the light of natural reason, we must inquire how they were enabled to teach by natural knowledge matters outside its scope. However, if we bear in mind what we said in Chap. VII of this treatise our difficulty will vanish: for although the contents of the Bible entirely surpass our understanding, we may safely discourse of them, provided—

LS: Not "entirely," "mostly".

Reader:

> we assume nothing not told us in Scripture: by the same method the Apostles, from what they saw and heard, and from what was revealed to them, were enabled to form and elicit many conclusions which they would have been able to teach to men had it been permissible. (*TPT*, chap. 11)

LS: Now let us stop here. There are two implications. Spinoza deals with this subject very gingerly. Now the first point is this. That is purely part of the external argument. That is no difficulty. He says: I understand by a rational argument. Not only an argument the premises of which are accessible as true to natural reason, but also an argument which starts from revealed premises, can still be a legitimate argument. But at the end of what you read, he makes a remark: The apostles could teach, could draw inferences from the revealed premises, if it were permitted to them. What does he mean by that? Permitted by whom?

Student: The state.

LS: Sure. That is an indication of the problem which will become clearer later on in the last chapters, the conflict between the power spiritual and the power temporal in Christianity. The situation in early Christianity—a pagan empire and a Christian community—laid the foundation according to Spinoza (and according also to Hobbes) for the conflict between the power spiritual and the power temporal—which in this form did not exist in the Old Testament, at least not as long as the Jewish state existed, because that was a unity, of course, although that was also impaired at the beginning. Now let us turn to page 162, paragraph 2.

Reader:

> Further, although religion, as preached by the Apostles, does not come within the sphere of reason, in so far as it consists in the narration of the life of Christ, yet its essence—

LS: That also contains much more than meets the eye, because the life of Christ means of course also the birth as well as the passion and resurrection. We must never forget that, because otherwise it would surpass the capacity of the human mind. The miracles. Yes?

Reader:

> which is chiefly moral, like the whole of Christ's doctrine, can readily be apprehended by the natural faculties of all.
>
> Lastly, the Apostles had no lack of supernatural illumination for the purpose of adapting the religion they had attested by signs to the understanding of everyone so that it might be readily received; nor for exhortations on the subject: in fact, the object of the Epistles is to teach and exhort men to lead that manner of life which each of the Apostles judged best for confirming them in religion. (*TPT*, chap. 11)

LS: Let us stop here. You see here the distinction which he makes when he explains the position. The apostles, he says first, had a strictly rational teaching. Then he qualifies that and says their premises were not rational, but they were entitled to argue rationally from these premises. But still, the core or the foundation of the New Testament—the Gospel, the teaching of Christ—that is purely rational. You remember that he had already made remarks to this effect in the first two chapters of the book. The whole teaching of Christ was purely rational, and therefore the New Testament and the New Testament alone is quasi-authoritative for reason. I say quasi-authoritative because since natural reason is able to find out the rational morality by itself, it does not need any authority. Do you see that? Since, say, Marcus Aurelius could find the rational morality by himself, in a way Marcus Aurelius's work is as good for moral instruction as the New Testament. On the other hand, however, there is no need for breaking with the New Testament; the New Testament being generally accepted can furthermore be used for the same purpose. That he seems to say.

Here is a note to this paragraph, which stems from the first French translation of the *Treatise*, which used Spinoza's marginal notes when they were translated into French. And when he says that "the whole doctrine of Christ," the French edition adds: "namely that which Jesus Christ had taught on the mountain and which St. Matthew mentions in chapter 5 following." You know that, we have already discussed that last time. The key point as far as Spinoza was concerned is the commandment: Do not resist evil. Now we know what Spinoza thinks about that as a part of rational morality. Do you remember that? In the seventh chapter? This is counsel taken from the times. If you live in a very corrupt society—[xi]

Reader:

> We must therefore understand him to refer to the permission to admonish which he had received as a teacher, and not as a prophet. We have not yet made it quite clear that the Apostles might each choose his own way of teaching, but only that by virtue of their Apostleship they were teachers as well as prophets; —

LS: Do you see this? Not only prophets, but also teachers. They were also prophets; never forget that. But the emphasis is on teachers.

Reader:

> however, if we call reason to our aid we shall clearly see that an authority to teach implies authority to choose the method.

[xi] There was a break in the tape at this point.

LS: Is this clear? If someone is made a professor, even an instructor, by this very fact he has a certain freedom regarding the how of his teaching. That is clear. Now it would still be clear in the case of the apostles.[17] Let us see what he is driving at with that. [Page 163.]

Reader:

> It will nevertheless be, perhaps, more satisfactory to draw all our proofs from Scripture; we are there plainly told that each Apostle chose his particular method (Rom. xv. 20): "Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation." If all the Apostles had adopted the same method of teaching, and had all built up the Christian religion on the same foundation, Paul would have had no reason to call the work of a fellow-Apostle "another man's foundation," inasmuch as it would have been identical with his own: his calling it another man's proved that each Apostle built up his religious instruction on different foundations, thus resembling other teachers who have each their own method, and prefer instructing quite ignorant people who have never learnt under another master whether the subject be science, languages, or even the indisputable truths of mathematics. Furthermore, if we go through the Epistles at all attentively, we shall see that the Apostles, while agreeing about religion itself, are at variance as to the foundations it rests on.

LS: You see, now he is gradually disclosing what he means by the rationality of the apostolic teaching. Well, let us see.

Reader:

> Paul, in order to strengthen men's religion, and show them that salvation depends solely on the grace of God, teaches that no one can boast of works, but only of faith and that no one can be justified by works (Rom. iii. 27, 28); in fact, he preaches the complete doctrine of predestination. (*TPT*, chap. 11)

LS: You see what he is driving at: the apostles were teachers, *doctors*; hence, disputes. The prophets on the other hand, the Old Testament prophets, used chiefly imagination; hence, as he said in chapter 2, also disagreements. These two arguments are meant to meet. You know, when he speaks about the fact that the prophets say very different things because imagination is *varia et inconstans*, varying and not reliable, in the case of the apostles he gives different reasons, but the result is the same. As far as the apostles go, either [first], they used philosophy, as did Paul; then they brought in the mixture of the pure teaching of Christ with pagan philosophy and that culminated in scholasticism. (That is of course the complication.) Or [second], they did not bring in philosophy; then they preserved the prejudices of the Jews. But then what about the pure teaching of Christ, disregarding completely what the apostles taught?[18] [What] does he call the teaching of the apostles in relation to the teaching of Christ? The foundations. In other words, then you have the mere[19] [preaching] of morality without the foundations, and therefore you cannot leave it at the teaching of the Gospels proper themselves. Spinoza seems to suggest there can be agreement in religion going together with disagreement regarding the foundations; that is the very special contention which he makes here.

But of course one must raise the question: Can Paul's foundations justify the true religion? That question will come up in the next section [when] we [will] discuss also in this form: Can Paul's dogmas be used as a foundation for the true moral teaching? —a question which is absolutely essential for Spinoza's argument, for the following reason: he denies all speculative truth to the Bible. The Bible is true only regarding its moral teaching. You remember, that was the great theme. But how can this be, since the true moral teaching must be based on the true theoretical teaching? The Bible supplies a basis for the allegedly true morality by its teaching divine providence, for example. But if its teaching is false, can it really be the basis of the true morality? That is the great question. Or is not what Spinoza suggests to be the true morality, i.e., the morality of the Bible, not something which is tolerable for practical purposes, for popular instruction but not identical with true morality? That something of this kind is necessary can be shown from the outset as follows. Spinoza allows the statesman a very great moral latitude, reminding of Machiavelli, a latitude which is incompatible with strictly understood biblical principles. He cannot have his latitude of political morality without a break with biblical morality anyway, and this latitude is a part of the true rational morality as he conceives of it. At the end of this chapter, you have seen a reference which is not uninteresting, when he speaks of the Jews, the others who preached to the Jews, i.e., despisers of philosophy. Does this statement have any bearing, any substance? What do you think, Rabbi ____?

Student: Would that refer to his own excommunication?

LS: That would be too weak an argument. Why should he call the Jews despisers of philosophy, rather than the Christians too? Because there were also Christians who were extreme.

Student: There were many statements which were opposed to philosophy, even though there were Jewish philosophers.

LS: Well, what is the difference between Judaism and Christianity in this respect?

Student: Well, the emphasis is on law in Judaism . . .

LS: Much more.

Student: And a faith in Christianity, and therefore philosophy was very relevant to Christianity to justify faith, whereas philosophy may break down the basis of law in Judaism and hence may be dangerous, and was viewed as dangerous by many people.

LS: Well, of course by many people; there were also many Christians who regarded philosophy as dangerous, but I think the main point is this. Surely in Judaism the dogma is much more implicit—a kind of agreement of the community, as it is called in Islam—than in the formulations of Christianity. That is quite true. But quite empirically speaking, a man can be a first-rate authority in Judaism, traditionally speaking, who does not have an inkling of philosophy. That is absolutely impossible in Christianity. A fully competent Christian teacher must have had some philosophical training. Philosophy was somehow accepted through the mere fact that not only the apostles but the Church fathers were the founders, formed the decisive part

of Christianity. And the place of the church fathers is taken by the Talmudic rabbis who kept philosophy back. Well, one can also illustrate it by the two most famous medieval authorities in Christianity on the one hand, and Judaism on the other: Thomas Aquinas and Maimonides. Now both wrote theological and philosophical things, but in a very different way. When Maimonides uses the word philosophy, or philosophers, it invariably means non-Jews. That you could speak of a Jewish philosopher took some generations after Maimonides, if my knowledge is correct; [it is] surely not in Maimonides, whereas in Christian tradition, for example, *philosophia Christia* is a term used by Augustine. I don't believe that one could speak in the older Judaism of the philosophy of Moses. But today the old words have lost their contours, therefore that doesn't mean much. But that I think was impossible. Christianity was to that extent a kind of synthesis of Judaism and Greece, which Judaism itself was not; and the only analogon you have in Jewish history, Philo of Alexandria, characteristically does not play any role in traditional Judaism. That remained a kind of curiosity belonging to a special period but did not form the character of Judaism. On Maimonides, I am 99.9 percent sure that I am right, and I know also that for about one or two generations after him he is sometimes called "philosopher" by Jews, but that was afterwards. The general usage—when he speaks of philosophers, he invariably means non-Jews.

Student: I was wondering, would Avicenna be a Jewish philosopher?

LS: Who?

Student: Avicenna.

LS: Avicenna is a Muslim. No, no. But even there, even in Islam the problem also exists. Islam is in this respect perhaps in the middle between Christianity and traditional Judaism. In other words, the teacher, the religious teacher, is also primarily the expositor of the law, i.e., of what is to be done or omitted. There is no strict parallel to theology in Judaism and Christianity, to revealed theology. What took on this similar function was called in Islam *Kalam*, which means literally something like dialectics but which is in fact something like apologetics, defending the law against unbelievers, not a positive doctrine the way it is in Christianity. Christianity has much more taken over from the theoretical notions of the Greeks than Judaism and Islam. As regards the usage in the Islamic world, I simply know much less about it and so I can't say. But I think there was something similar; I remember when I was much younger and I wrote an article on a subject in this field and I translated the Arabic word *falsafa*, which is just an Arabic transcription of the Greek word philosopher, and I sent it to an orientalist journal. It was returned to me with the declaration that apparently I don't know anything: the word *falsafa* does not mean philosopher, it means heretic. Now this was of course the gross ignorance, I am sorry to say, of the man who wrote this letter, but he had on the other hand one true point.[20] He did not know the philosophic books written by Muslims, but in the common books, especially [those] written by the theologians, philosopher frequently meant a heretic and nothing else, which shows[21] that this was also an extraneous suspect thing in itself. But I would like to add that[22] traditional Islam since I don't know what century accepted the science of *Kalam*, as they call it, which can loosely be called theological apologetics. And it was even taught; there are such things in Cairo and other places as a matter of course. In Judaism it was never part of official training even though it existed. True and genuine Jewish learning does not necessarily include it. There were of course quite a few Jewish writers, Jewish rabbis who knew philosophy very well. They played a great

part, but not from the point of view of the Jewish tradition proper. And Spinoza in this respect, I believe, does not say anything which is unfair, although he uses very strong language.

I think we have now finished the part which is most peripheral to the subjects discussed in this department, but I am absolutely opposed to "picking" when studying a book, that one should only take the part which is immediately relevant, since the argument immediately relevant to us, the political argument here, is inextricably linked with the theological part of it. One has at least to take cognizance of it. What Spinoza does in the next four chapters, up to chapter 15 (that is the conclusion of the theological discussion proper) is to draw the conclusions and find a biblical teaching which he can still regard as authoritative, and yet which gives him the freedom for politics and for political organization which he needs. We have then to come to the political teaching proper in chapter 16.

Now are there any points you would like to bring up regarding our subject? You must never forget that these discussions, of which Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise* is an important document (it is of course[23] not the only one[24]) [provide] one of the key presuppositions of the modern, liberal, secular world. The arguments today are entirely different; things are raised which were wholly unknown in Spinoza's time, and the argument in detail in entirely different. But the fundamental problem is the same, and one can only say[25] the fundamental problem was stated of course with much greater force in this crucial period, when the problem came into the open, than it is stated now. Now it has become a tacit implication of the present-day secularist position. In order to reach clarity about the fundamental problem involved, it is much better to read the earlier thinkers than today['s]. Today the fundamental problems are obscure, because the tradition of liberalism, secularism, has become established and the traditions are not likely to face the question of their own foundation. What was once true of the religious tradition, that is was too easygoing, had too secure a position, is now true of its enemy. It takes itself for granted. Is there any point you would like to take up? Well, then we will meet again on Thursday.

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2 Deleted "and he"
3 Deleted "he"
4 Deleted "he"
5 Deleted "of the"
6 Deleted "but"
7 Deleted "has"
8 Deleted "then"
9 Deleted "to"
10 Deleted "verbal inspiration. Now the point"
11 Deleted "he"
12 Deleted "here in these remarks which we just read"
13 Deleted "Let us turn to the bottom of the page where he takes this up."
14 Deleted "if they"
15 Deleted "Now you see"
16 Deleted "and who"
17 Deleted "Now"
18 Deleted "How"
19 Deleted "preachment"
20 Deleted "in the common usage"
21 Deleted "what. Which shows"
22 Deleted "whereas"

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[23] Deleted "but of which it is"
[24] Deleted "that is"
[25] Deleted "it was stated"

Session 8: no date

Leo Strauss: We have come now to the absolutely central section of Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise,* which is not necessarily the center of his political teaching narrowly understood, but of the overall teaching. We should begin from the beginning. If we take the broadest basis (which is in no way controversial, at least is generally accepted), it is generally admitted that we have to understand our civilization, our culture or whatever you call it, the modern world, which is primarily [the] Western world, but which has a strange capacity to spread. I do not go into the question whether this is in itself a sound beginning of reflection to understand our culture, our civilization, whether in strict thought one does not presuppose universal standards in order properly to analyze any given civilization. In a very simple way, you cannot speak of our culture or this culture without having a previous conception of what[1] a culture [is], which is not this or that, and that surely precedes any analysis of historical phenomena. That is clear. But let us not go into that subtlety now.

Now [regarding] our culture, the modern world, modern thought: a very common view is that [it] is secularized biblical thought, for example, modern democracy is a secularized version of the discovery of the dignity of the individual soul; [and] even capitalism: as you know, there is a doctrine according to which capitalism stems from Puritanism, which means that [it] is the secularized form or consequence of Puritanism, of Calvinistic Christian doctrine. Now however this may be, what does secularization mean? The word has a perfectly clear meaning when we speak of the secularization of monasteries under Henry VIII, meaning that they lost their original function of religious works as they were understood by the Catholic Church, and were given to the secular power to dispose of them as he saw fit, for example, for making schools, establishing schools there, but also just selling them. Secularization, that has a clear meaning.

What does secularization mean when applied to thought? It surely means, at minimum, a modification of biblical thought, otherwise one would not speak of secularization of that. But this secularization can mean two very different things: a) a corruption of Biblical thought, or b) a perfection of biblical thought. These are the two interesting alternatives. To take the latter view, that was the Hegelian interpretation of modern thought: that modern thought, modern political thought, was a perfection, the completion of the Christian teaching. The modern state succeeded in reconciling the Bible with the world, with the *saeculum*. And Hegel meant this: the Reformation began it by abolishing the difference between the clergy and the laity, and the French Revolution completed it by making the principle of the dignity of each individual or the rights of man the effective political principle. To repeat, secularization might mean [either] corruption or perfection.[2] But Hegel wrote at the end of this period, after the French Revolution. If we turn to the crucial century, the seventeenth century, and to some extent also the eighteenth, and study this in an unbiased way, I believe (but I emphasize this "I believe" because not everyone believes that) [that] we reach this conclusion: on the highest intellectual level this movement did not understand itself as a perfection of Christianity. On the highest level it understood itself as a break with biblical thought, a break disguised as a perfection of it. In other words, these people, of whom Spinoza is one, consciously transformed the biblical teaching into what they knew to be[3] non-biblical thought, or they used the Bible—they used the Bible—consciously for non-biblical purposes. On the lower level, popular teachings[4]—you know, that is the subphilosophic level of the work—[and] that happens very frequently [to be] bona fide,

because this simple argument taken from charity [inaudible][i] incompatible with perfection must make an impression on every . . . and you know that leads on and on and on. So on the lower levels many people sincerely believed that this modern project was the perfection of the biblical teaching. But what I contend is this: that on the highest level of consciousness and of theoretical clarity, this was not true. And in the case of Spinoza, I believe—we [will] have partly to do with that today.

But Spinoza is not the only one. Another very great example in my opinion is Locke. Locke presents himself as the perfector of the Christian teaching. But I think if one reads Locke with some care, one sees that his is not the teaching of the New Testament restored in its purity. To mention only one case, Locke says that there is a fundamental [law]—the natural law, the law of reason—[which] is identical with the law of the Gospel. Now the key natural law according to Locke is "no taxation without representation," and I ask you to find a passage in the Old or New Testament where this is stated. There is a famous passage which rather states the opposite, about Caesar and God,[ii] you remember? But there are many more such examples. Now I have stated this view some time ago regarding Locke, and I observed a very violent reaction to that because people don't want to raise this question of the very complicated origin of modern thought.[iii] The result is satisfactory, therefore the causes must be satisfactory. That is unfortunately not a good inference, because results may be satisfactory accidentally and not essentially. What one has to do in such a case is, I think, in the first place to admit the necessity for serious discussion, and serious discussion is by definition not a violent discussion. One must really simply sit down and read. Well, if I should prove to be wrong, I will have to take it, but I think the same would also be true of the people who have the opposite opinion. Now this much about the general background.

Now let us see what appeared in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* up to now as the fundamental problem. We have seen that Spinoza has shown a definite preference for democracy in chapter 5. Democracy is understood as self-government of the people, and that means that the people are not subject to anyone. The people do not obey anyone. Does this ring a bell, after today's report?[iv] The people do not obey anyone. What does the Bible teach?

Student: Obedience.

LS: Obedience. In other words, in this politically most important case, the people as a collective, it doesn't apply. But I do not want to pursue this line of argument now. I want to pursue it as follows. Let us assume that this is democracy: self-government. On what ground is democracy preferred? We must try to answer this question on the basis of the evidence we have up to now; later we will find others. The argument was officially based on the Bible as the authority, and that means the Bible contains the all-important truth, which is suprarational and the revealed

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[i] There is a blank space in the transcript which might indicate an inaudible word or phrase.
[ii] Matthew 22:21, Mark 12:17, Luke 20:25.
[iii] For Strauss's interpretation of Locke, see *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), chapter 5, and "Locke's Doctrine of Natural Law," in *What is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959), chapter 8.
[iv] Strauss apparently refers to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded (nor, evidently Strauss's comments).

character of which is confirmed or guaranteed by miracles. That was the position which Spinoza presupposes [and] to which he refers again, as we have seen. When he speaks in the concluding chapter of the true doctrine of the Bible, which has to be accepted, he mentioned [that][5] one reason is confirmation by miracles. But what have we learned up to now? In the first place, miracles do not confirm anything. Miracles are not possible and/or not knowable. In practice this amounts to the same thing. Secondly, the Bible does not contain the authentic record of revelation. For example, Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch, and therefore what we read about the revelation there was written by people who could not have been eyewitnesses, to say nothing of the fact that the Bible is poorly compiled and poorly preserved. The third point is the one which is most immediately relevant. The teaching of the Bible in speculative matters is not super-rational, but infra-rational: imagination, etc. The moral teaching of the Bible is sound, and in this respect no corruption of the text is to be feared. The Bible is then the document of revelation authoritative in its moral teaching. In all other respects it entitles everyone equally to judge for himself. In moral matters, it determines our judgment. In all other matters, it entitles everyone, even obliges everyone, equally to judge for himself. There cannot be any authority except in moral matters narrowly understood. Hence, democracy. The Bible authorizes everyone equally to judge. That is democracy, for if everyone has the right to judge in matters spiritual, naturally he would[6] all the more [have] that right in matters temporal. That is a good argument. Do you see that? I mean, that is not stated in this form by Spinoza, but that is what is suggested by the whole argument.

But here a difficulty arises. How is this authority of the Bible, limited to moral principles, possible? Spinoza said that the true morals and politics are based on the true theoretical or speculative teaching. The Bible however sets forth a speculative teaching which contradicts the true speculative teaching. The simplest example [is] Providence, which we have discussed on another occasion. The Bible teaches Providence, reward of the just, punishment of the unjust; and reason says with Solomon [that] one fate meets the just and the unjust. Therefore we begin to suspect that the moral teaching set forth by the Bible is not even the true moral teaching. We have only one clear indication of that now, and that was the discussion of the command “Do not resist evil,” which Spinoza interprets away, as you will recall, by saying this is good advice only under very bad circumstances—complete corruption—and cannot be understood as a [possible] moral teaching[7].[8]

After these general remarks, let us turn to our text, and we begin with chapter 12. Now at the beginning of chapter 12 (we don’t have to read that), Spinoza makes this assertion. And here we have to follow the argument very closely.[9] Spinoza has shown the poor character of the text of the Bible—corruption and all this kind of thing, and of course people will accuse him[10] [of being] a very impious man, [that] he desecrates the most holy. And then he says: I don’t do that at all because the word of God is not in any letter or letters, or parchment or ink, but in the heart of man, i.e., in his interpretation, in the human mind. The opposite view is that of the carnal Jews, and especially of the Sadducees. You see, here he uses this thing I mentioned before. The Sadducees were those who did not believe in resurrection, and they were also particularly scriptural. The Pharisees admitted an oral law not contained in the Pentateuch and belief in resurrection. The Sadducees rejected this oral law and rejected resurrection. They were particularly heretical. And Spinoza says these heretical people who stick to the letter of the text, they are my enemies and they are yours. But this is irrelevant. The crucial point is this: the word

of God is the true religion, i.e., the true faith. Now what does this mean? Let us turn first to a somewhat later passage on page 169, second paragraph. It begins as follows: "Let us now see what has to be properly understood by the word of God." Do you have that?

Reader:

> I think I have now sufficiently shown in what respect Scripture should be accounted sacred and Divine; we may now see what should rightly be understood by the expression, the Word of the Lord; *debar* (the Hebrew original) signifies word, speech, command, and thing. The causes for which a thing is in Hebrew said to be to God, or is referred to Him, have been already detailed in Chap. I., and we can therefrom easily gather what meaning Scripture attaches to the phrases, the word, the speech, the command, or the thing of God. I need not, therefore, repeat what I there said, nor what was shown under the third head in the chapter on miracles. It is enough to mention the repetition for the better understanding of what I am about to say—viz., that the Word of the Lord when it has reference to anyone but God Himself, signifies that Divine law treated of in Chap. IV.; in other words, religion, universal and catholic to the whole human race, as Isaiah describes it (chap. i. 10), teaching that the true way of life consists, not in ceremonies, but in charity, and a true heart, and calling it indifferently God's Law and God's Word. (*TPT*, chap. 12)

LS: Now let us stop here. Do you remember that chapter on the divine law? Chapter 4. That is the first light we get here. The word of God is the true religion, is the true faith, is identical with the divine law as described in chapter 4, and that is the universal or catholic religion.

Student: That law as he described it, although it was universal was not, as he says here, a true heart in charity. It was knowledge or the attempt to understand the intellect of God.

LS: Very good, let us keep that in mind. You have touched already on the crucial difficulty. Spinoza changes that meaning of that universal, of this divine law in order to make possible a provisional identification of the divine law in chapter 4 with the basic teaching of the Bible. And what happened in this fourth chapter is that he identifies them—this divine law, divine law [being] equal to the revealed law—to make it more simple, and then[11] of course also to show its inequality. What he means of course is they are unequal, but for provisional purposes he identifies them. Let us read the immediate sequel.[12]

Reader:

> The expression is also used—

LS: Not "expression": "the Word of God."

Reader:

> used metaphorically for the order of nature and destiny (which, indeed, actually depend and follow from the eternal mandate of the Divine nature), and especially for such parts of such order as were foreseen by the prophets, for the prophets did

not perceive future events as the result of natural causes, but as the fiats and decrees of God.

LS: Do you see something here already? The word of God means the order of nature, but in the Bible it means the order of nature as the prophets understood it, i.e., as the prophets misunderstood it. So that is not an interesting meaning for the word.

Reader:

Lastly, it is employed for the command of any prophet, in so far as he had perceived it by his peculiar faculty or prophetic gift, and not by the natural light of reason; this use springs chiefly from the unusual prophetic conception of God as a legislator, which we remarked in Chap. IV.

LS: Now what is the validity of this conception of God as legislator according to Spinoza? It is untrue. So in other words, the word of God has three different meanings, of which two are subrational, infrarational. The only interesting one is that which identifies the word of God with the divine law as defined in chapter 4. That alone is truly the word of God. Now go on where we left off.

Reader:

There are, then, three causes for the Bible's being called the Word of God: because it teaches true religion, of which God is the eternal Founder—

LS: Eternal author. Let us keep [it] literal because it is of some interest. "Of which God is the eternal author." Yes?

Reader:

because it narrates predictions of future events as though they were decrees of God; because its actual authors—

LS: Yes, true authors. Authors. Yes?

Reader:

its true authors generally perceived things not by their ordinary natural faculties, but by a power peculiar to themselves, and introduced these things perceived, as told them by God.

LS: Do you see? God the author in one place, the prophets the authors in the other place. God was not the author of these narrations, the prophets were the authors. The prophets introduce God as speaker. There is only one word of God in which God is the author, and that is the divine law. That is clear from what he says. Yes?

Reader:

Although Scripture contains much that is merely historical and can be perceived by natural reason, yet its name is acquired from its chief subject matter. (*TPT*, chap. 12

LS: Yes, from the higher, from what deserves it most. You see[13] [the same] in many other things: when you say a man, meaning a male human being, you don't mean a baby by that. The name applies to the most perfect of that kind. If you say to a fellow "Bring me a horse," and he brings you a colt, you tell him "I told you to bring a horse, not a colt." Obviously a colt is a horse, but it is not quite a horse. The name horse is given primarily to the complete and perfect horse. And that applies generally: the name is given from the more deserving, from the higher, and therefore the name, word "God" refers primarily to what is the word of God in the fullest sense, and that is divine law as defined in chapter 4. Now go on. [Page 170.]

Reader:

> We can thus easily see how God can be said to be the Author of the Bible: it is because of the true religion therein contained, and not because He wishes to communicate to men a certain number of books. We can also learn from hence the reason for the division into Old and New Testament. It was made because the prophets who preached religion before Christ, preached it as a national law in virtue of the covenant entered into under Moses; while the Apostles who came after Christ, preached it to all men as a universal religion solely in virtue of Christ's Passion—

LS: You see, signs about resurrection again. That goes through.

Reader:

> the cause for the division is not that the two parts are different in doctrine, nor that they were written as originals of the covenant, nor, lastly, that the catholic religion (which is in entire harmony with our nature)—

LS: No, that is weak. Which is most natural, *maxima naturalis*.

Reader:

> was new except in relation to those who had not known it: "it was in the world," as John the Evangelist says, "and the world knew it not." (*TPT*, chap. 12)

LS: Stop here. You see, he always finds a biblical quotation which somehow fits. Let us come back to the main point. The word of God is the true religion, the divine law, or the universal or catholic religion. And this religion is taught equally in both Testaments. But that is an understatement, because if you remember what he said in chapter 4,[14] why limit yourself to the Old and New Testament? This divine law is identical with the natural law as he understands natural law. This natural law is taught also elsewhere. It is taught everywhere where rational people speak; therefore it is natural to the highest degree. The real conclusion is what? If the word of God is the divine law as defined in chapter 4, what is the conclusion regarding the Bible?

Student: We do not need it.

LS: We do not need it. The Bible might have all kinds of other uses, but for that purpose we do not need it. What Spinoza must now try to do is to bridge the gap between that divine law and the Bible. He makes clear in the sequel—we can disregard this here—[that] the word of God thus understood cannot be corrupted in the way in which books can be corrupted, that's clear, because it is not written down. But the really important part of the argument continues [below, but first I have to add something which we overlooked]. Now he refers to the Bible, and he finds out what the essence is of the sum of the Bible. And the answer is: to love God above everything else and thy neighbor as thyself. On the basis of the biblical passage, that's clear. Now what he then does is this. What was the formula, the sum of the divine law, in chapter 4?

Student: Love of God.

LS: Yes, intellectual love of God. And now what is the sum of the Bible? Love of God. Intellectual is dropped, plus love of neighbor. An enormous difference. They are now somehow identified, and we will see later on that this is of crucial importance. Now does he go on from there? [Page 172.]

Reader:

> As this corner-stone—

LS: This is the cornerstone, love of God plus love of neighbor.

Reader:

> is intact, we must perforce admit the same of whatever other passages are indisputably dependent on it, and are also fundamental, as, for instance, that a God exists, that He foresees all things, that He is Almighty—

LS: More literally, that he exercises Providence for all. More than that.

Student: I thought he didn't believe in Providence.

LS: He is now speaking of the premises or conclusions from the love of God and love of neighbor. He raises the question: What are the conditions which must be fulfilled if the love of God and love of neighbor is to be the end of man? Surely Spinoza could have done that, but[15] in order to understand the dilemma, you have to consider each formula by itself. Now the characteristic thing is Providence. There can be doubt that he means that . . . [v]

Reader:

> that He is Almighty, that by His decree the good prosper and the wicked come to naught, and, finally, that our salvation depends solely on His grace.
>
> These are doctrines which Scripture plainly teaches throughout, and which it is bound to teach, else all the rest would be empty and baseless—

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[v] It is possible that there was a break in the tape at this point.

LS: Wait a second. In other words, what Spinoza says now [is] that love of God—which is not intellectual love of God—plus love of neighbor, would be baseless without the belief in Providence, in particular without belief in divine reward and punishment. Yes, go on.

Reader:

> nor can we be less positive about other moral doctrines, which plainly are built upon this universal foundation—for instance, to uphold justice, to aid the weak, to do no murder, to covet no man's goods, etc. Precepts, I repeat, such as these, human malice and the lapse of ages are alike powerless to destroy, for if any part of them perished, its loss would immediately be supplied from the fundamental principle, especially the doctrine of charity, which is everywhere in both Testaments extolled above all others.

LS: So in other words, Spinoza changes the picture still a bit and says [that] it is not simply love of God and love of neighbor, but charity, meaning love of neighbor. That is the crucial point: love of neighbor. Now we touch here on the most interesting problem of the whole work. I will explain that. The root of the Bible from which everything else [stems], the foundation, is the commandment to love thy neighbor as thyself. This is not possible without belief in God as the creator of all men; and furthermore, it is not possible without belief in Providence. Spinoza says now that [this] is the divine law, i.e., the natural law as defined in chapter 4. Was there any reference to love of neighbor in chapter 4? None. Chapter 4 was only concerned with the perfection of the individual, i.e., with the liberation of the individual from the passions, which blind and disturb. The relation to other men was strictly subordinate to this consideration. It was a strictly egotistic morality. Spinoza then implies—I know that I have not yet proved that, but I put it this way in order to show that the matter is not so trivial—Spinoza implies that the commandment "Love they neighbor like thyself" is tenable only in a theological context, only in a context which cannot be supported by natural reason. Is this not strange? I read to you a parallel from a later thinker who has certain things in common with Spinoza: Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, in that edition which I use, Flammarion, page 110.[vi] He speaks of pity, of the natural passion of pity,

> which instead of this sublime maxim of rational justice—do to the other as you wish that one does to you—that is the sublime maxim of rational justice. Pity inspires all men with this other maxim of natural goodness, not reasoned goodness, which is much less perfect but perhaps more useful than the preceding one. And what does this natural goodness dictate? Do your good with the least evil to others that is possible.

You see, Rousseau is completely silent about love thy neighbor like thyself in the positive sense. He takes a more limited view. "Do to others what you wish[16] [be done to your]self." That is noble, sublime, but it is perhaps less useful, as he expresses himself cautiously, than the one "Do your good with the least evil to others that is possible." What does this imply, the latter formula? Pursue your good with the least hurt of others that is possible.

[vi] The original transcript identified the editor as "Aron," which could not be identified and is likely a mistranscription. Flammarion is the editor of the edition Strauss used in *Natural Right and History*.

Student: Essentially it implies that it is impossible to do an act which is only good, that is, that in any good act . . .

LS: Be more precise.

Student: That in the pursuit of your own true virtue you should try to avoid hurting other persons.

LS: He didn't say anything of virtue. Pursue your interest with the minimum harm to others. You necessarily do harm to others, but if you are a decent fellow you will keep it at a minimum. Therefore self-love—love thyself—is incompatible with loving the other like thyself. You give yourself natural reason for that command, and that is the command which Spinoza gives here. We find another example of that in Locke. When Locke speaks of the fundamental reason, the basic principle is self-preservation. Simple. And self-preservation is according to the general teaching compatible with the self-preservation of everyone else. But Locke has to admit, seemingly grudgingly, [that] there are conflicts, and what takes place in case of conflict? If it does not come into conflict with your self-preservation: me first. This fundamentally is the same thing which Spinoza has in mind. The problem is how to reconcile it with some social order. That he will try to do. That is crucial. So he has his eyes open. He rejects the biblical principle of conscience, not only certain special doctrines of the Bible like Balaam's she-ass or so, but the very center of the Bible: "Love thy neighbor like thyself" is the non-rational teaching. This will come out more clearly later. Yes?

Student: Because charity is an untenable doctrine according to natural reason, what happens to his emphasis on charity with religious toleration?

LS: That is a very good question, but you should be able to answer that.

Student: Well, I take it he wants to preserve charity, religious toleration—I mean, the balance of religious opinion . . . but [it] doesn't affect the practice of the philosopher.

LS: Did you ever hear the expression "argument *ad hominem*"? An argument which does not claim to be simply true but is based on the premises which the opponent asserts.[17] For example, one may argue about social science in a discussion on the premise that science must be value free. The man who does not believe that social science can be value free views that as an argument *ad hominem*, because the opponent grants it.

Student: As I understand it, it means directed to undermining the credibility of the statement.

LS: Not necessarily. I think I understand what you mean by that. Let us first see what Spinoza does. Spinoza says: You believers in the Bible, if you read the Bible carefully and sincerely, you come back ultimately to the principle of charity. And now reminding you of your principle, I tell you that your practice of persecution contradicts your principle. That is an argument which stands on its own feet. The question arises, then: Is charity as taught by the Bible a rational principle? Spinoza thinks no. Therefore his pleas for freedom of speech cannot be based on the biblical principle of charity but must have another foundation, and we must try to find it when

we start on chapter 20. This much is clear. Now you raise the entirely different though very important question: Is Spinoza not dishonest? Does it not simply amount to that?

Student: In that sense the whole book is dishonest.

LS: Sure. Spinoza knows that. Spinoza's theological doctrine has exactly the character in this respect as the noble lie in the Platonic sense.[18] He accepted the fact that the Bible enjoys the greatest authority, and therefore he tries on this given premise to reach what he regards as the best possible, the most rational solution. The most rational solution on the given premises is of course not necessarily the most rational solution simply. That is the problem. Did I dispose of your problem?

Student: [inaudible][vii]

LS: That we must see. In other words, what we have to look for, stated more generally, [is that] a large part of the work, the largest part of this work is based on biblical premises, however differently he interprets these passages than the theologians do. Since he denies the authority of the Bible, his own teaching cannot be identical with that, with the biblicist part of his argument. We must find his purely rational argument. Now there is one way of doing that simply, and that is to study the *Political Treatise* which is [in] no way based on the Bible.[viii] There are partial references, but it does not depend on that. But what is lacking in the *Political Treatise*[19] is the whole question of freedom of speech. Therefore one gets an incomplete notion of Spinoza's political doctrine if one just dismisses the *Theologico-Political Treatise* and says it is a pamphlet for a definite purpose and not[20] meant to represent in full Spinoza's causal principles, although we will see in chapter 16, and also chapter 20 we will get some presentation of Spinoza's philosophic or rational principles.[21]

Student: What would happen if the people in authority in a state draw the same kind of conclusions from Spinoza's argument as you do, namely that charity is not the true teaching?

LS: But then they would cease to be believers in the Bible.

Student: No, no. These are people who would not necessarily profess to be Christians.

LS: Oh, I see. Say, a brutal Cesare Borgia.

Student: No, not necessarily brutal, just a ruler of the state who sees in Spinoza's argument . . .

LS: Yes, that is where the difficulty in Spinoza comes is, but not so directly as you seem to believe. Spinoza would say: Well, you are just what the doctor ordered, a sober, rational unbelieving ruler. With you I can talk business. Sure. Let us discuss together what [is] the best thing for you to do, and let us even start first from the crudest premise and say you only want to

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[vii] A note made by the transcriber indicates that the student's response concerned chapter 20.
[viii] The *Political Treatise* (1675-76) was a later, unfinished work of Spinoza more solely focused on political matters than is the *Theological-Political Treatise*. The final three sessions of this course are focused on its interpretation.

preserve yourself in power—Machiavelli's problem in the *Prince*—and then I will show you that it is absolutely stupid of you to make life miserable for your subjects. That is not too difficult to show. The[22] trouble would be to talk to this fellow if he were a man of passion and guided by passions, and in that case Spinoza would say: Nothing better could happen to you than that you would believe in the Bible, that you would have fear of hell. Do you see? Now what would be the problem? The problem would be—let us assume Spinoza has reached the end completely. Let us make a utopian assumption: a perfectly unbelieving world. Would this not ruin his whole scheme? Must he not have something like the Bible in order to get the mass of men to that minimum of decency without which no society can last? That is, I think, the difficulty which arises on his own level but which was no way contemporary with him. You know, that came out only with the progressive secularization of the Western world. But you will see that Spinoza anticipated that in a way. Spinoza did not favor absolute freedom of speech—let us go step by step. But is the difficulty as it appeared up to now removed?

Student: Well, I take it the difficulty would be solved in the reconstruction of certain foundations for toleration of natural law.

LS: Sure, you will see—that I can also mention in passing—the divine law of chapter 4, which up to now is the highest principle and which means intellectual love of God, and everything required for aiding the individual to this intellectual love of God [is] called the law, the divine law. In chapter 16, at the latest, it will become clear that there cannot be a natural law strictly speaking in Spinoza's doctrine. You see, we are still very much in the periphery of his teaching. Chapter 16 can be summarized as follows: there is no natural law, there is only natural right; and this natural right is identical with[23] natural power, and a malicious moron has a natural right to act as a malicious moron and is not subject to any law. And that is exactly the problem of Spinoza. How can he, with such a fantastic beginning which seems to undermine all society and all morality, arrive at a moral teaching? That is the problem, and we surely must face that. But we have not yet reached that point, because he still must first settle accounts with the Bible. You know that is for him the first and most important step which he has to take.

There is only one other passage in chapter 12 at which we should look, and that is page 170, line one from the bottom.

Reader:

> Because it is one thing to understand the meaning of Scripture and the prophets, and quite another thing to understand the meaning of God, or the actual truth. (*TPT*, chap. 12)

LS: That must be more literally translated: it is[24] [one thing] to understand Scripture and[25] [the mind] of the prophets, and something else to understand the mind of God, i.e., the very truth of the matter. You know, we came across this question of the mind of God when we discussed the first chapter.[26] Can we ascribe [mind] to God only figuratively—or metaphorically as Spinoza says? That is another confirmation. [27]For example, say, the principle of contradiction or any other law of thinking, i.e., an object of thought, not a thinking mind, not a subject, can be ascribed to God. That only confirms what we have said before. But this only in passing. To

summarize: in chapter 12, Spinoza identifies the divine law of chapter 4 with the word of law, i.e., the essence of Scripture. And[28] of course we have already seen how very precarious that is.

Now let us turn to chapter 13. He shows in this chapter the simplicity of the biblical teaching, i.e., the biblical teaching is in no way philosophic. But in spite of this the Bible contains purely speculative things, which is flatly contradicting an earlier statement according to which the Bible does not contain any merely speculative things. Yet these purely speculative things, Spinoza says, are very few and very simple. This follows from the fact that the Bible demands from men nothing but obedience.[29] You see this is now somewhat changed. [LS writes on the blackboard] I don't know whether you understand my picture. Here, revealed law; divine law. Divine law demands intellectual love of God. Revealed law demands love of God plus love of neighbor. And I underline love of neighbor because that is the key thing. Now we get another version of that: obedience. Obedience means obedience to God, i.e., love of neighbor. So love of neighbor is possible only as obedience. Love of neighbor is not possible on the basis of reason. Let us read on page 176, paragraphs 3 to 5.

Reader:

> Furthermore, as obedience to God consists solely in love to our neighbor—for whosoever loves his neighbor, as a means of obeying God, hath, as St. Paul says (Rom. xiii.8), fulfilled the law—it follows that no knowledge is commended in the Bible save that which is necessary for enabling all men to obey God in the manner stated, and without which they would become rebellious, or without the discipline of obedience.
>
> Other speculative questions, which have no direct bearing on this object, or are concerned with the knowledge of natural events, do not affect Scripture, and should be entirely separated from religion.
>
> Now, though everyone, as we have said, is now quite able to see this truth for himself—

LS:[30] There is one[31] [sentence] which I would change: "do not confirm Scripture, and ought therefore to be separated from revealed religion." That is in the text. The ambiguity is this, that he speaks of true religion and one does not always know whether the true religion is the religion of pure reason or the religion of the Bible, and even the revealed religion. Therefore one must watch his references and the translation of course makes it impossible to follow Spinoza's argument.

Let us stop here for one second. Revealed religion, in contradistinction to the catholic or true religion of which he has spoken in chapter 12, is concerned only with love of neighbor in a spirit of obedience to God. It is the religion of obedience. Now let us read the next paragraph, where you left off.

Reader:

> I should nevertheless wish, considering that the whole of Religion depends thereon, to explain the entire question more accurately and clearly.

LS: Literally, "Because from here the decision about the whole, or about all religion[32] depends." We are now really very close to the core, to the decision. Yes?

Reader:

> To this end I must first prove that the intellectual or accurate knowledge of God is not a gift, bestowed upon all good men like obedience; and, further, that the knowledge of God, required by Him through His prophets from everyone without exception, as needful to be known, is simply a knowledge of His Divine justice and charity.

LS: Now let us read the sequel; [page 177].

Reader:

> Both these points are easily proved from Scripture. The first plainly follows from Exodus vi. 2, where God, in order to show the singular grace bestowed upon Moses, says to him: "And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob by the name of *El Sadai* (A. V. God Almighty); but by my name Jehovah was I not known to them"—for the better understanding of which passage I may remark that *El Sadai*, in Hebrew, signifies the God who suffices, in that He gives to every man that which suffices for him;

LS: In other words, that is the word of Providence. Yes?

Reader:

> and, although *Sadai* is often used by itself, to signify God, we cannot doubt that the word *El* (God) is everywhere understood. Furthermore, we must note that Jehovah is the only word found in Scripture with the meaning of the absolute essence of God, without reference to created things.

LS: We can stop here, perhahps. The main point was only[33] that the God who is just and charitable is the God of Providence, and that is not the God of reason.

Student: What do you mean by the God of Providence?

LS: The God who exercises Providence, who knows each . . . and who rewards the just and punishes the unjust. Very simple. Let us turn to page 180, top.

Reader:

> Wherefore we may draw the general conclusion that an intellectual knowledge of God, which takes cognizance of His nature in so far as it actually is, and which cannot by any manner of living be imitated by mankind or followed as an example, has no bearing whatever on true rules of conduct, on faith, or on revealed religion; consequently that men may be in complete error on the subject without incurring the charge of sinfulness. (*TPT*, chap 13)

LS: You see again—I note revealed religion is now the subject, and it becomes clear that the principle of revealed religion and of the true religion as said before are radically different. In this chapter we can say Spinoza separates the divine law as defined in chapter 4 from the revealed religion. And so we have by this contradiction a statement of the problem: the divine law identical with the revealed law, that is no problem; reason says the same thing which revelation says. And then of course it also follows that it is absurd to demand the separation of theology from philosophy. If they teach the same, if the Bible and philosophy teach the same, why should they be separated from each other? Only if they teach different things, contradictory things, is their separation indispensable. And this separation is the subject of the two following chapters.

I will mention only one point from the beginning of chapter 14. We have to discuss chapters 14 and 15 next time. At the beginning he says—let us read that, perhaps, on page 182, line 9 from bottom.

Reader:

> We will not, however, accuse the sectaries of impiety because they have adapted the words of Scripture to their own opinions; it is thus that these words were adapted to the understanding of the masses originally, and everyone is at liberty so to treat them if he sees that he can thus obey God in matters relating to justice and charity with a more full consent— (*TPT*, chap. 14)

LS: Let us stop here. So what Spinoza says, then, is that the thing which counts is charity. But he has now added justice, justice which belongs according to the traditional doctrine to the natural virtues, the moral virtues such as charity belong to the theological virtues in the Christian teaching. So Spinoza approximates the Bible and reason by adding justice. However this may be, now justice and charity are the things which count, the only things which count. But everyone needs different reasons which induce him to a just and charitable behavior. What these reasons are is absolutely uninteresting; the main point is that he acts justly and charitably. The only thing which can be demanded, and as he contends is demanded of everyone by the Bible, is just and charitable behavior. The reasons are utterly irrelevant. And therefore a philosopher who acts justly on the basis of a purely rational morality, without believing in the legislating God, is as good from the biblical point of view as someone who obeys or who acts justly because he believes he fulfills the will of God. That does not make any difference. That is the point which he is driving at.

But one point I would like to mention in conclusion, that is a very important element in the thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Historically it can be explained as follows. There was the persecution, the religious wars, the disunion everywhere, and people looked for a common ground. The common ground would be found first of all in the literal text of the Bible; that was one attempt. But that did not somehow work because of the difficulty of the text, and then people withdrew to the moral teaching and, more radically, to a rational moral teaching allegedly common to all men. That is the only ground of peace. If men regard moral conduct as of no importance, then on this basis you can have peace.[ix] But then what becomes of religion? [This is] the classical problem of Kant,[34] who brought this moralism to its perfection. Kant says

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[ix] The transcription of this sentence may be corrupt, or alternatively Strauss may have intended to say “religious” where he spoke “moral.”

religion consists in doing one's duty as the will of God, i.e., I do my duty as a moral man because my . . . But that is mere morality. In the moment I regard this as comprising the will of God, it is religion. That implies that the older religion (prayer, for example) has nothing to do with genuine religion. That is mere lip service according to Kant, this kind of thing, just compliments.

The reduction of religion to morality or to a support of morality was a very powerful thing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A difficulty arose then which made this solution no longer satisfactory, and Spinoza plays a certain role in this development, you see. You can see this, for example, by comparing it with Hobbes, or with Locke for that matter. Hobbes and Locke also tried to reduce it to the bare minimum, but since they were more Christian than Spinoza was, for obvious reasons, they say the teaching of the Christian Bible, the New Testament, is [that] Jesus is the Messiah, period. That you have to believe. And you see also the formula "the Messiah"; all trinitarian things were disregarded, and resurrection too: Jesus is the Messiah. Spinoza tries to find a formula—this of course would be impossible as the formula for the Old Testament—by taking both Testaments as equally important. He had to find a formula common to Old and New Testaments, common to Jews and Christians, and then he found the formula "justice and charity." That is the requirement. But Spinoza was much too much of a philosopher old-style to leave it at this morality. He knew quite well that the merely moral perfection, the merely good will as Kant came to call it, is not sufficient for man's perfection: intellectual perfection is also needed. And therefore this whole moralism is ultimately assigned by Spinoza to the Bible as a teaching which does not have any solid foundation but is excellent for general edification, for public exhibition.

I am sorry, I havze to leave it at that. Next time we will continue that, and if we finish our discussion of chapter 14 and chapter 15, Mr. ____, we will have your paper.

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1 Moved "is"
2 Deleted "Now"
3 Deleted "a"
4 Deleted "and also, well"
5 Deleted "the fact"
6 Moved "have"
7 Moved "possible"
8 Deleted "Now"
9 Deleted "The word of God – I must mention the pre-history which you didn't mention in your paper."
10 Deleted "as"
11 Deleted "that"
12 Deleted "where you left off"
13 Deleted "well"
14 Deleted "it would be wrong"
15 Deleted "you have to go through"
16 Deleted "to do"
17 Deleted "Can you give me a convenient example? Well"
18 Deleted "Student: As what? **LS**: The noble lie in the Platonic sense."
19 Deleted "and that"
20 Deleted "and not"
21 Deleted "What happens when the people in authority in the state draw the same kind of conclusions from Spinoza's argument as you do? **LS**: Repeat it."

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[22] Deleted “trouble is not so much the – the”
[23] Deleted “the”
[24] Deleted “something else”
[25] Deleted “remind”
[26] Changed from: “Can we ascribe to God only figuratively, of metaphorically as Spinoza says, that is another confirmation. The mind of God—for example, say the principle of contradiction, or any other law of thinking, i.e. an object of thought, not a thinking mind, not a subject, can be ascribed to God.”
[27] Deleted “the mind of God”
[28] Deleted “this”
[29] Deleted “Now”
[30] Deleted “By the way”
[31] Deleted “point”
[32] Deleted “religion”
[33] Deleted “Providence – is that”
[34] Deleted “Kant”

Session 9: no date

Leo Strauss: [in progress] —the biblical teaching to the demand for charity. Beliefs are subordinate to charity. You may believe what you want, Spinoza suggests, provided these beliefs induce you to charitable practice. Charity, however, is not possible as guiding acts of men unless it is supported by divine providence, belief in divine providence, because natural reason does not teach us anything about charity as the one thing needful, at any rate. That can be based only on revelation. But we know already that Spinoza does not believe in revelation. Revelation requires proof by miracles, for example, and miracles are impossible, as we have seen. So "justice and charity as the bliss of man" is not a true teaching but a salutary teaching.

Now what Spinoza meant exoterically, meaning as a popular salutary teaching, became a century after Spinoza a philosophic teaching, and that was a change of the utmost importance. That is the meaning of Kant's teaching. Kant believed he could prove the impossibility of the theoretical life as traditionally understood, namely, by proving the impossibility of a natural theology. All demonstrations of the existence of God are untenable. There is no knowledge except the knowledge available in empirical knowledge and scientific knowledge, knowledge of the so-called phenomenal world. Knowledge of the true world, the world as it is in itself, is impossible. Therefore this cannot be the meaning of human life; the meaning of human life can only consist in something which transcends the merely phenomenal, and in Kant's opinion the only phenomenon, the only fact, which has contact with true reality is morality. The good will, as Kant calls it, complying with the moral law, is the one thing needful, and the only thing which counts; everything else depends, every given quality depends regarding its value on the intrinsic morality of the individual who acts.[1] One can show [this] without too great [a] difficulty by taking the beginning of Kant's first presentation of his moral teaching,[2] *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*, which begins with an examination of all things esteemed by men, and showing that these things cannot be esteemed truly. He speaks there not only of wealth and such external things but also the virtues, as, for example, courage, or wisdom, or moderation. All these kinds of things have no value in themselves; only the good will gives the value. In this examination of virtue, he speaks of all virtues with the exception of justice. Justice—that is the tacit implication of Kant—justice is *the* virtue, i.e., *the* social virtue. And one therefore says[3], taking into consideration other remarks by Kant, that the most important thing is to be just, to act justly for the sake of justice. And just action consists primarily, fundamentally in recognizing in deed the rights of man, in recognizing the value of every human being as a human being. That is the overriding consideration. That was however prepared, as I indicated, by such men as Spinoza insofar as here in the subordinate teaching of Spinoza, justice and charity are the only things which count, not any speculation. But in the case of Spinoza, to repeat, that is an exoteric teaching. His serious teaching is the old one: the perfection of man consists in speculative perfection, in theoretical perfection, and not in moral perfection as such.

I would like to mention another parallel, if I remember well, in Hobbes's[4] [last] utterance on the subject, which occurs in his book *De Homine*, *On Man*, 1658. He reduces all the duties of man also to justice and charity, just as Spinoza does here. But Hobbes does this in an entirely different way, and perhaps it is worthwhile to contrast Hobbes's thesis with Spinoza's thesis. What is the basis of Hobbes's teaching according to which justice and charity, i.e., virtues related to other human beings, are the only ones which are truly virtues? What's the basis of Hobbes?

Self-preservation. Let us always start from that. Self-preservation requires peace. If people are running around with flaming guns all the time that is not[5] [a] good condition for self-preservation. Peace. But peace is not possible without peaceful habits. The habits of peace, these alone are truly virtues. Therefore justice and charity are the virtues and not courage, not moderation, as Hobbes explicitly says; they come in only in a subordinate way. But here there is this difficulty: since for Hobbes justice and charity are only required for self-preservation, they have only an instrumental value. They do not have true dignity because they are required only for one particular purpose. They are required, one can say, as a condition of happiness. But happiness of course does not consist in them.

To understand this development which leads to the fact that social virtue as such, and that is the practical meaning of what these men mean by justice and charity, takes the place of the whole tradition, not only of theoretical virtue but also of the other moral virtues. We only have to contrast this directly with Plato or Aristotle. For simplicity's sake I take a passage in Plato's *Republic* where he says—I think it is in Plato's *Republic*, it can also be in the *Phaedo*, I don't have my reference here—the whole political virtue[6] consists of justice and moderation.[i] To make it clear: justice and moderation [on the one hand]; justice and charity [on the other]. Justice is identical in both schemes, we can disregard that. The place of moderation is taken by charity, and that is indeed a very revealing formula. We must only try to understand that. What does it mean in practical terms? I mean, you must not think here of the original and full meaning of charity, but there is a very crude, superficial meaning of charity involved: help the needy, and this kind of thing, and be conciliatory, not any theological depth. But what is the striking difference between moderation and charity, as a characteristic difference?

Student: Charity involves other people; moderation is in oneself.

LS: Yes. And you?

Student: I was thinking of the fact that in the case of charity one is judged by one's good works, but in the case of moderation you judge only for the psychological effect.

LS: No, no, no. Moderation has also to do with how you behave toward food and drink.

Student: That's a superficial test of moderation.

LS: Yes, but you cannot look into the heart—if you see a man who gives all his money to the poor, he may be a very shrewd politician; and the man who controls himself regarding food and drink may be a very shrewd criminal. That is not the point. What you said is of course the crucial point. Moderation is concerned with the building up of the individual within himself, rather than with his external relations. But there is something else which is also implied. The end of moderation means something which we can loosely call—and the loose usage will later be justified—some form of asceticism. Self-restraint. Charity as here understood has nothing to do with self-restraint. The morality which developed in the seventeenth-eighteenth century was characterized by the fact—not such an emphasis on self-restraint but rather do good to others. When Burke at the end of this period took issue with the moral doctrines connected with the

[i] Strauss might be referring to the discussion in book 4 of the *Republic*, 430d ff.

French Revolution, he emphasized this point very strongly, that the virtues of self-restraint had lost their former status and, as he puts it, this place had been taken by a virtue called *humanité*, humanity. If you translate charity by humanity, that is perfectly adequate in this connection. A general humanitarianism which has no essential relation to self-restraint was the outcome of this development in the seventeenth-eighteenth century, and that is not unconnected with the very famous fact of this century, the emergence of political economy. Political economy is by its definition not concerned with self-restraint, but rather with productivity, and the idea being in a crude way by the increase of productivity relieving man's estate, [to] be humanitarian. And the increased productivity is much more important for relieving man's estate than the self-restraint of each individual. This is, I think, the broad context of this development, of which Spinoza is at least to some extent a representative. Yes?

Student: It seems to me though that charity presupposes a certain amount of self-restraint, even in Spinoza's terms.

LS: Some, sure.[7] But haven't you seen such people who are very much concerned with, and honestly concerned with relieving misery all around, but not very strict in their morals?

Student: This doesn't follow.

LS:[8] What I am driving at is that it is not merely an accident of some individuals, but it has something to do with a certain form of political-social doctrine which developed, a doctrine which puts all the emphasis on social improvement, relieving man's estate, and sees no essential connection between that and self-restraint. Surely, if you mean that you have to have self-restraint regarding the others, that's clear. But the question is of self-restraint in the things in which others are not directly concerned.

Student: Do you mean that the emphasis on charity is on the material welfare of the environment, and not on the spiritual?

LS: Sure, that is clear. I think I emphasized that. And you find very interesting remarks on this subject at the beginning in Bacon. Bacon's revolt against Aristotelian philosophy was made in the name of charity. This Aristotelian speculative science did not bring any fruits to man; it was sterile, it was not charitable. The new science, with its inventions—all the things it produces for the benefit or for the relief of man's estate—this science is as such charitable. That was Bacon's notion. This [was] an important part of this great development.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: The notion becomes much cruder in the process. Charity is really not the proper word to describe that, and when they spoke in the eighteenth century of humanity, that is a bit closer. A book was written in the early eighteenth century which brought out this point very clearly: Private vice, public benefit, by Mandeville,[ii] an English writer. What did he mean? For example,

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[ii] Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733) was a political philosopher and satirist. His most famous work, *The Fable of the Bees; or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits,* was controversial for its allegedly immoral

luxury was regarded as a vice. But this vice is eminently profitable. Well, that was always known: profitable to some people who exploit it. But it was said: No, profitable to the poor; the economic effect of luxury. But if something is profitable to the poor, that is an infinitely more important consideration than whether it doesn't do harm to the soul of men, their taste, or whatever it might be, and that had enormous effect. But I think one must keep these things in mind if one wants to understand that.

Well, before we turn to chapter 14, I would like to know whether there is any point I could clear up now. Yes?

Student: Would it be correct to say that so far Spinoza has built his concept of democracy on the concept of charity, and therefore . . . a theological one.

LS: Yes, one could say that. That is, [9]naturally, as a final answer misleading. [10]The Bible according to Spinoza's interpretation demands as the one thing needful charity, and not specific beliefs. The Bible is indefinite regarding speculative matters, as he puts it. It follows that charity alone is required. Alone. Secondly, at the same time, the Bible entitles everyone equally to have any opinion theoretically he pleases, provided these opinions lead up to charitable acts. But by giving everyone the equal right to judge in matters spiritual, he implies that everyone must surely have this same right in matters temporal. I mean, taking the context of his argument, this follows necessarily: democracy. That I think is a more precise formulation. You see? Clearly. But since Spinoza does not believe in revelation, we must try to find out what is his rational or philosophic argument in favor of democracy of which we know hitherto practically nothing.

Student: Now in one part of an earlier chapter, he does imply that monarchy is not based upon theological premises and is not based upon charity. That was somewhat earlier.

LS: Not quite. But even assuming that it is exactly as you say, what would follow from that if Spinoza would ultimately recognize charity as the principle? That we must see.[11] However I must add [something] immediately lest there be any misunderstanding. Some of you will remember[12] the divine law, the natural law, which prescribes actions of individuals, primarily of individuals, directed to man's bliss, intellectual love of God. This is not a divine law strictly speaking, because Spinoza denies that God can be conceived as a legislator. Nor is it a natural law strictly speaking because Spinoza denies that there are natural ends. The divine or natural law is strictly speaking a law of human origin which man prescribes, not with a view to his natural end but with a view to an end which man himself somehow rationally postulates, which is not imposed upon him by nature. That we must keep in mind, otherwise we will not understand his philosophic doctrine developed in chapter 16. Yes?

Student: I think this is still in the same general area. He concludes on the next-to-the-last page of chapter 13—he says we may draw the general conclusion that an intellectual knowledge of God which takes cognizance of his nature as it actually is, and which cannot by any manner of living be imitated by mankind or followed as an example, has no bearing at all on the true rules of conduct.[13]

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teaching. Although he is one of the originators of the idea of division of labor, his philosophy should not be confused with the *laissez-faire* attitude of later thinkers like Adam Smith.

LS: One moment. "The intellectual knowledge of God, which considers God's nature as it is in itself, and which nature man cannot imitate in a definite manner of life, nor take as a model, in order to establish the true way of life, does not belong in any way to faith and revealed religion." Where the word revealed could also be drawn to faith, I mean, according to the—

Student: It doesn't have, this passage—whatever true rule of conduct is the crucial one, because I think there is something wrong with this, that is, that God has no bearing on true rules of conduct, that is, knowledge of God.

LS: I beg your pardon?

Same student: If Spinoza is here saying[14] that knowledge of God has no bearing on true rules of conduct, which is what our translation says, then this seems to me a self-contradiction, because he goes on later to draw rules of conduct from the nature of God.

LS: But let me again translate it as literally as I can. "From all this we conclude, that the intellectual knowledge of God, which considers God's nature as it is in itself, and which nature man cannot imitate in a definite way, nor take as a model establishing the true way of life, does in no way belong to revealed faith and religion, and hence men may err regarding that nature without crime completely." They may completely err regarding that. Now what is the difficulty here?

Student: Well, later on Spinoza will go on to say that because of the way nature is, each man must act in his own self-interest; and therefore it is right that he act to the full extent of his powers, because God as nature acts to the full extent of his powers. Therefore from the nature of God he draws his basic standard of ethical conduct. But he is here saying you can't do that.

LS:[15] I really do not understand. His immediate implication of what he says here is this. Revealed religion has nothing to do with the intellectual knowledge of God in which man's true bliss consists. This much is clear, this un-equation is clear. But what follows from that? Since man is only a part of the whole, he cannot possibly act as the whole, that's clear. But[16] I see how your difficulty [arises]—in the sixteenth chapter the argument is as follows. [It] is a conclusion from the whole to the part, as we will see in chapter 16[17]: the power of nature is identical with the power of God; and therefore, since God can act as he pleases, not according to any law, it applies also to nature as a whole. But therefore it also applies to every part of nature. The great difficulty here is [that] therefore a fool, a moron, his way of acting is as legitimate as that of the sage. And then the question arises: How can Spinoza arrive at any morality? That we must take up when we come to that; for the time being we must postpone it.

But what I was about to make quite clear was this, that Spinoza's doctrine as developed up to now and even up to the end of chapter 15 is his theological doctrine, his doctrine based on revelation and the Bible. And this doctrine is addressed to believers in the Bible, but of course [it] has no force when addressed to people who do not believe in the Bible. Now Spinoza happens to be one of those who do not believe in the Bible, and therefore this cannot be his own

teaching. His own teaching he begins to develop in chapter 16 following. We have some foretaste of it, but not a developed doctrine.

Now let us then turn to chapter 14, and first read on page 182, line 9 from bottom.

Reader:

> We will not, however, accuse the sectaries of impiety because they have adapted the words of Scripture to their own opinions; it is thus that these words were adapted to the understanding of the masses originally, and everyone is at liberty so to treat them if he sees that he can thus obey God in matters relating to justice and charity with a more full consent—

LS: Let us stop here. So, obedience to God in matters of justice and charity. If I am not mistaken, that is the first time that justice comes up, but charity has been mentioned before. Piety consists in being just and charitable on the basis of divine command, in the spirit of obedience. This alone is religion—that is implied—not prayer, for example. And that means then, if this alone is important, that means perfect freedom of opinion as distinguished from action. The question is whether Spinoza can maintain this point. Now let us continue where we left off.

Reader:

> but we do accuse those who will not grant this freedom to their fellows, but who persecute all who differ from them, as God's enemies, however honorable and virtuous be their lives; while, on the other hand, they cherish those who agree with them, however foolish they may be, as God's elect.

LS: He is speaking now of the sectarians, with whom Spinoza agrees more than with the orthodox, because the sectarians do not allow ecclesiastical power, and they do not admit the tradition, the post-biblical tradition. That is the point. The sectarians he has in mind are biblicists, as he is. The literal meaning of the Bible is the only thing which counts. Later decisions of councils or traditions are of no use. And secondly, there is no ecclesiastical power; there is not a clergy in any sense.

Student: Does he think of Calvinists?

LS: No. They are authoritarians in this sense. The sectarians were people like the Mennonites, with whom he lived, and Socinians and such people. No, no; that is a common distinction made in churches, and the sociologists of religion try to define the type of church on the one hand, and the sect on the other—somehow. So a phenomenon like Calvinism, Lutheranism, and of course Catholicism, would be churches, but such things like Mennonites and Quakers would surely be sects. That has become a subject of great and difficult distinction. But from Spinoza's point of view, I think one can simply say the people with whom he agrees most among the Christians are people who say [that] only the literal reading of the Bible counts, and there is no ecclesiastical authority. Of course even with them he does not ultimately agree, as we know. [It's] relative. And quite a few of these sects were of course in favor of toleration, as you know, and they have important practical agreement. Yes, now let us go on.

Reader:

> Such conduct is as wicked and dangerous to the state as any that can be conceived.
>
> In order, therefore, to establish the limits to which individual freedom should extend, and to decide what persons, in spite of the diversity of their opinions, are to be looked upon as the faithful, we must define faith and its essentials. This task I hope to accomplish in the present chapter, and also to separate faith from philosophy, which is the chief aim of the whole treatise.

LS: The chief aim of the whole *Treatise* is to separate faith from philosophy. So let us stop here for a moment. You see also one thing: there are limits to freedom of opinion. He is now going to establish the limits of legitimate disagreement. There is no absolute freedom of opinion. That is important. But don't forget the context. Spinoza is here now still speaking, if I may say so, as a theologian, on the basis of the Bible. The Bible does not have a dogma in the way in which it was understood by both Judaism and most Christians, but still, not everything is possible. For example, if someone would say the Bible teaches atheism, or admits or allows atheism, that would go too far. You see, there are some limits. And that is the importance [of the question, since] this is one of the major documents of the seventeenth century regarding toleration: Where does Spinoza put the limits of toleration, the limits also of freedom of speech? That he will do in the sequel. You must always interrupt me if you have some point you would like to raise. Go on.

Reader:

> In order to proceed duly to the demonstration let us recapitulate the chief aim and object of Scripture; this will indicate a standard by which we may define faith.
>
> We have said in a former chapter that the aim and object of Scripture is only to teach obedience.

LS: Keep this in mind: only obedience. This decides in a way the ultimate issue for Spinoza because reason does not dictate obedience; therefore there is a cleavage between reason and the Bible, between faith and philosophy. Yes?

Reader:

> This much, I think, no one can question. Who does not see that both Testaments are nothing else but schools for this object, and have neither of them any aim beyond inspiring mankind with a voluntary obedience? (*TPT*, chap. 14)

LS: Schools of obedience. Why does he[iii] not repeat it? Spinoza repeated it. He says here more precisely: these are all means not towards the sciences, but toward obedience alone. So that is the clearest statement. Here, that's science [LS writes on the blackboard]; this is obedience. Reason, revelation. Now in the sequel he will develop again that this obedience means love of the neighbor. Can you skip the next passage, because it repeats the same thing. When he says "which everyone can execute in order to obey God, the Scripture also says in many passages as clearly as possible, namely, that the whole law is this alone, namely love of thy neighbor." You see, not

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[iii] That is, the translator.

love of God. That is the clearest formula: intellectual love of God; non-intellectual love of neighbor. That is the antithesis as he states it. Can you go on there? [Page 183 bottom.]

Reader:

> It cannot, therefore, be denied that he who by God's command loves his neighbor as himself is truly obedient and blessed according to the law, whereas he who hates his neighbor or neglects him is rebellious and obstinate.

LS: Let us stop here. Love of the neighbor out of obedience to God makes man blessed, *secundum legem*, according to the law, i.e., not *secundum rationem*, according to reason. According to reason, that would not make a man blessed. Now from this principle of the law, he will say in the sequel [that] all dogmas of the catholic faith—the catholic faith means here the faith based on the Bible—are to be deduced by reason alone. In other words, he does not establish these dogmas by biblical quotations; that is not necessary. What he does is take the principle of revelation which transcends reason: love of neighbor is the necessary and sufficient condition of blessedness. He raises the question: What are the conditions of this possibility? This he establishes by reason alone. Now there is a long prehistory of this in medieval thought; I cannot go into that. We continue on page 184, paragraph 3.

Reader:

> In order, therefore, to set forth the whole matter methodically, I will begin with a definition of faith, which on the principle above given, should be as follows: Faith consists in a knowledge of God—

LS: Not knowledge. *Sentire*, to think, in the loose sense of the word. To opine, you could almost say.

Reader:

> a notion of God, without which obedience to Him would be impossible, and which the mere fact of obedience to Him implies. This definition is so clear, and follows so plainly from what we have already proved, that it needs no explanation.

LS: Do you see? That is a purely rational question, then. What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for obedience to God? These conditions are the dogmas. And these dogmas must be admitted; and their denial cannot be tolerated. Yes?

Reader:

> The consequences involved therein I will now briefly show. I. Faith is not salutary in itself, but only in respect to the obedience it implies, or as James puts it in his Epistle, ii. 17, "Faith without works is dead" (see the whole of the chapter quoted). II. He who is truly obedient necessarily possesses true and saving faith; for if obedience be granted, faith must be granted also, as the same Apostle expressly says in these words (ii. 18), "Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." So also John, 1 Ep. iv. 7: "Everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God: he that loveth not, knoweth not God; for

> God is love." From these texts, I repeat, it follows that we can only judge a man faithful or unfaithful by his works. If his works be good, he is faithful, however much his doctrines may differ from those of the rest of the faithful: if his works be evil, though he may verbally conform, he is unfaithful. For obedience implies faith, and faith without works is dead.

LS: You see, incidentally, the emphasis on James and the complete silence on Paul, because by faith alone, that is exactly what he rejected. Works are indispensable. Works are the only thing which count, so that for a moment he makes us doubt whether we need any faith, whether any faith can be determining. It is only the works, the charitable actions, which count. One could even say: Well, if the works are done, not out of obedience to God, but for any reason, is this then not also saving faith, since what the fellow believes issues in charitable actions? Spinoza touches on that but he recoils, as we will see in the immediate sequel, [page 185].

Reader:

> John, in the 13th verse of the chapter above quoted, expressly teaches the same doctrine: "Hereby," he says, "know we that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit," i.e. love. He had said before that God is love, and therefore he concludes (on his own received principles), that whoso possesses love possesses truly the Spirit of God.

LS: Do you see the reference to the dubious premise? Hence he concludes, namely, from his principles, which he had then accepted, not on evidence for that. Yes?

Reader:

> As no one has beheld God he infers that no one has knowledge or consciousness of God, except from love towards his neighbor, and also that no one can have knowledge of any of God's attributes, except this of love, in so far as we participate therein. If these arguments are not conclusive—

LS: You see, another reference to the fact that this is not authoritative. Go on.

Reader:

> they at any rate, show the Apostle's meaning, but the words in chap. ii:3-4, of the same Epistles are much clearer, for they state in so many words our precise contention: "And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."
>
> From all this, I repeat, it follows that they are the true enemies of Christ who persecute honorable and justice-loving men because they differ from them, and do not uphold the same religious dogmas as themselves: for whosoever loves justice and charity we know, by that very fact, to be faithful: whosever persecutes the faithful, is an enemy to Christ. (*TPT*, chap. 14)

LS:[18] In other words, we are back to this great difficulty. Why any faith? Why any determination of faith, of belief, since the actions alone count? Spinoza leads up to this extremely tolerant point of view, but then he makes some conservative qualifications in the sequel. Yes?

Reader:

> Lastly, it follows that faith does not demand that dogmas should be true as that they should be pious—that is, such as will stir up the heart to obey; though there be many such which contain not a shadow of truth, so long as they be held in good faith, otherwise their adherents are disobedient, for how can anyone, desirous of loving justice and obeying God, adore as Divine what he knows to be alien from the Divine nature?

LS:[19] So what is required is charitable action. But men cannot act without having preceding opinions, that is what Spinoza implies. Therefore only those opinions can be called pious which induce men to act charitably. If these opinions were necessarily identical for all men, you could draw up a list of dogmas which are obligatory on all men. But experience shows that the same course of action can be induced by very different opinions. Therefore we have a very great latitude, perhaps an infinite latitude. That is the problem. Still, Spinoza is[20] sure that there are some limitations regarding belief, and he is now trying gradually to develop them. Let us go on.

Reader:

> However, men may err from simplicity of mind, and Scripture, as we have seen, does not condemn ignorance, but obstinacy. This is the necessary result of our definition of faith, and all its branches should spring from the universal rule above given, and from the evident aim and object of the Bible, unless we choose to mix our own inventions therewith. Thus it is not true doctrines which are expressly required by the Bible, so much as doctrines necessary for obedience, and to confirm in our hearts the love of our neighbor, wherein (to adopt the words of John) we are in God, and God in us.
>
> As, then, each man's faith must be judged pious or impious only in respect of its producing obedience or obstinacy, and not in respect of its truth; and as no one will dispute that men's dispositions are exceedingly varied, that all do not acquiesce in the same things, but are ruled some by one opinion some by another, so that what moves one to devotion moves another to laughter and contempt, it follows that there can be no doctrines in the Catholic, or universal, religion, which can give rise to controversy among good men.

LS: Let us stop here. *Honestos*, among decent men. Spinoza does not say then that there are no dogmas, since any dogma might lead men to charitable action, but he says: No, some dogmas we must settle on; they must be of such a kind that all moral men, all decent men, regardless of whether they are Confucians or Christians, or Greek pagans, for example, would never disagree. But this must somehow be in accordance with the Bible. That is the difficulty. The dogmas must be acceptable to all decent men. Now, I hope the philosophers are decent men; must they not also be dogmas which are acceptable to the philosophers? And philosophers according to Spinoza cannot believe in a legislating God, in a God who exercises providence. That's the problem. Do

you see the dilemma which Spinoza has? I mean, after having said the Bible demands nothing but charity, meaning love of neighbor—therefore opinions are free. But Spinoza knows that this principle—love thy neighbor as the one thing needful—necessarily has theoretical premises, and therefore you cannot accept the command, love thy neighbor, as the guiding principle of your life unless you embrace certain theoretical principles. If that is so, the denial of these theoretical principles must be prevented. And if the philosophers by definition deny these principles, the philosophers must be persecuted, at least to the extent that they must be . . . Is this not necessary, then?

Student: I don't see why he has to bring out theoretical principles behind the teaching of charity. Simply that the Bible itself teaches charity ought to be sufficient. And if he indulges in the further examination of the theoretics behind it, he is doing exactly what the Bible doesn't do. That is, he is engaging in theoretics, whereas the Bible does not.

LS: But[21] Spinoza tells you, in the name of the Bible, charity is the one thing needful. And quite a few people, surely Spinoza, would deny it.

Student: But in the name of the Bible . . .

LS: Yes, in the name of the Bible. All right, then you presuppose the authority of the Bible. Then you have many more dogmas than Spinoza would want.

Student: Spinoza has rid everything from the true teaching of the Bible except the teaching of charity. So why . . .

LS: But the teaching of charity as[22] [a] divinely revealed teaching; without that support it would not be authoritative. It would not be a law. I think one can state Spinoza's argument against you as follows. If this is a biblical teaching, its authority presupposes the authority of the Bible, and that means *prima facie* you have to believe everything in the Bible, Balaam's she-ass as well as charity. I liberate you from this enormous burden of belief, but I cannot but admit that a minimum of beliefs is needed. You cannot believe that charity is the one thing needful required by God if you do not believe that there is a God, for example. You see the difficulty. He tries—if he could get away with an atheistic charity, morality, he would be glad, but that can't be done because charity cannot be demonstrated rationally. Charity can be made this highest principle only on the basis of revelation. Therefore he needs a minimum of revealed dogmas, and this minimum he is going to enumerate in the sequel.

Student: Of course, as soon as he does that he undermines the whole teaching of charity.

LS: But do you know a more elegant solution to his predicament? I mean, what other solution does he have? If charity is the principle of rational morality, he does not need the authority of the Bible. But that he denies. He can get charity as the guiding principle only if he accepts the authority of the Bible. If he wants to avoid large-scale persecution or muzzling, he must accept the authority of the Bible but reduce it to a bare speculative minimum, and that is what he is going to do. You will see when we come to the dogmas that they are indifferent to the distinction between Old and New Testament. Imagine. Therefore both Testaments[23] equally [teach] charity,

contrary to what he said in certain other passages. Both Testaments teach, equally, charity, and therefore both Testaments are equally divine. Therefore the premises can only be such as to be neutral to the difference between Old Testament and New Testament, or to the difference between Judaism and Christianity. The whole Christian dogma disappears, [and] similarly, also the whole specifically Jewish dogma to the extent to which it exists.

Student: Wouldn't he be better off leaving the consequences of charity, and the presuppositions of charity, alone?

LS: But then he would not clarify the problem. I mean, that is beating around the bush, which is very frequently a most prudent procedure, but only in the short run because the difficulty remains completely unsolved. Spinoza wants to say what is really essential to belief in order to get the maximum of freedom which can reasonably be demanded as long as the authority of the Bible is still formally admitted, which he does in this part of the argument. He has no other way. You see, I mentioned this last time. He is in a way more liberal than Hobbes and Locke are, who say the dogma required for salvation is "Jesus is the Messiah," which of course includes according to Hobbes's and Locke's interpretation belief in God and providence. But "Jesus is the Messiah" is the minimum in addition to the presuppositions in which you must believe (by which they mean not trinitarians, because that takes more than "Jesus is the Messiah"). But Spinoza even drops that. From this point of view Spinoza is much more a unitarian, if I may say so, than Hobbes and Locke, even. It is very hard to find people who are in favor of unqualified toleration in the seventeenth century, literally unqualified. And we will see that Spinoza comes out in the end with the important qualifications independently of his theological teaching. But let us go on where we left off, [page 186].

Reader:

> Such doctrines might be pious to some and impious to others, whereas they should be judged solely by their fruits.

LS: In a way, he retracts that. You see the constant tug of war: Should there be any dogmas, since works alone count? Still, you do need some dogmas. He always moves back and forth between these contradictory positions. Let us see how he finally settles the question.

Reader:

> To the universal religion, then, belong only such dogmas as are absolutely required in order to attain obedience to God, and without which such obedience would be impossible; as for the rest, each man—seeing that he is the best judge of his own character—should adopt whatever he thinks best adapted to strengthen his love of justice.

LS: You see, he takes the usual way out of such contradictions by making a distinction, saying [that] some are indispensable, and regarding all others everyone is free. But if you want to be pious you must admit some.

Reader:

> If this were so, I think there would be no further occasion for controversies in the Church.

LS: That is what he is driving after. He does not wish to leave any further room for controversy. He does not wish to pass the buck to someone else. He therefore has to face it.

Reader:

> I have now no further fear in enumerating the dogmas of universal faith or the fundamental dogmas of the whole of Scripture, inasmuch as they all tend (as may be seen from what has been said) to this one doctrine, namely, that there exists a God, that is, a Supreme Being, Who loves justice and charity, and Who must be obeyed by whosoever would be saved; that the worship of this Being consists in the practice of justice and love towards one's neighbor, and that they contain nothing beyond the following doctrines.

LS: Yes. Then he develops that in seven dogmas—that holy number, seven, is striking, especially since the chapter in which it occurs is chapter 14. I draw your attention to this curiosity, although a very elegant writer called this recently, in reference to such things,[24] [by] this wonderful word, gobbledygook. But unfortunately these things exist.[25] Sometimes people use such signs. That is indispensable in Spinoza's view. We don't have to read them, because they are really implied. Now one thing should be clear immediately: that these dogmas, as summarized in this formula, are not Spinoza's dogmas. Spinoza's God does not love charity and justice. That doesn't have any application to his God. So the philosophers, in other words, do not belong to the decent men—all decent men would admit it. Therefore let us see how Spinoza gets out of that after he has enumerated the seven dogmas. Do you have that? [Page 187.]

Reader:

> No one can deny that all these doctrines are before all things necessary to be believed, in order that every man, without exception, may be able to obey God according to the bidding of the Law above explained, for if one of these precepts be disregarded obedience is destroyed.

LS: Sure. Obedience will be destroyed. But he does not need, as a philosopher, obedience. But where is he now? What solution does he find for people like himself?

Reader:

> But as to what God, or the Exemplar of the true life, may be, whether fire, or spirit, or light, or thought, or what not, this I say, has nothing to do with faith any more than has the question how He comes to be the Exemplar of the true life, whether it be because He has a just and merciful mind, or because all things exist and act through Him, and consequently that we understand through Him, and through Him see what is truly just and good. Everyone may think on such questions as he likes. (*TPT*, chap. 14)

LS: You see? What he does is this. He formulates the dogmas in terms which are unacceptable to him as philosopher, but he retains the freedom of interpretation. From the formula which we

have read here you see that a one hundred percent materialistic atheist could be a decent man, provided he has the decency to call his matter God. That's all demonstrable. I think that is a fair description of what Spinoza says. If a decent man says: Well, matter, and matter produces man, and man has such and such a nature so that he cannot live well except by acting decently, which includes also to some extent charity—which most people would admit [and] most philosophers admitted. That's all right. The only thing is he must have the decency to call it God. You see, when he says "fire," you can also say "matter" as well. Now let us go on, [page 188].

Reader:

> Furthermore, faith is not affected, whether we hold that God is omnipresent essentially or potentially; that He directs all things by absolute fiat, or by the necessity of His nature; that He dictates laws like a prince, or that He sets them forth as eternal truths; that man obeys Him by virtue of free will, or by virtue of the necessity of the Divine decree; lastly, that the reward of the good and the punishment of the wicked is natural or supernatural: these and such like questions have no bearing on faith, except in so far as they are used as means to give us license to sin more, or to obey God less. I will go further, and maintain that every man is bound to adapt these dogmas to his own way of thinking, and to interpret—

LS: Obliged—not only permitted to interpret these dogmas, but obliged to accommodate them to his capacity. Yes?

Reader:

> and to interpret them according as he feels that he can give them his fullest and most unhesitating assent, so that he may the more easily obey God with his whole heart.

LS: Yes. So that is the solution. There are dogmas, definite dogmas, but these dogmas are legitimately subject to individual interpretation, and that amounts, if we speak clearly, to lip service. That is interesting also of course as a limitation of freedom of speech. And you must come up with this—but what is the rationale of that? That he will say in the immediate sequel on page 188, paragraph 3, the last sentence.

Reader:

> How salutary and necessary this doctrine is for a state, in order that men may dwell together in peace and concord; and how many and how great causes of disturbance and crime and thereby cut off, I leave everyone to judge for himself!

LS: You cannot possibly reject the Bible. That is politically impossible. That is imposed on him by his situation. Given the authority of the Bible, the public authority of the Bible, this is the only doctrine which satisfies the requirement for peace, toleration, and so on. That's the point, not more. You must, before presenting it, at least understand his position and to meet it on his own ground. The implication of course, needless to say, is this: if there were a society in which the Bible were not a public authority, this whole argument would cease to be of interest. That's

clear, because Spinoza does not believe in the authority of the Bible, as he has made abundantly clear.

Student: Hobbes himself doesn't raise these theoretical questions concerning the foundations of morals.

LS: No? Have you ever read part 3 of the *Leviathan*¸ "Of a Christian Commonwealth"?

Student: But he treats the questions in a different way. That is, he will allow the public authority of the Bible to remain within its own province so long as the spiritual authority is subservient to the sovereign state.

LS: This question will be taken up by Spinoza later in the political part, namely, is the sovereign, the civil sovereign, in any way obliged as sovereign to accept the authority of the Bible? And Spinoza now says: In my opinion, no, they are not obliged. There is no difficulty. The parallel to this question in Spinoza and in Hobbes is the discussion of what is required for faith. I have forgotten now which chapter that is in the *Leviathan*. It is in the third part, toward the end. And his key answer, which strictly corresponds to what Spinoza says, is that the minimum of faith is [that] Jesus is the Messiah,[iv] and he makes it clear that this includes belief in God and so on. It is the same pattern. Hobbes's own statement, to which I have referred more than once, that Spinoza's *Treatise* "went through him a vast length; he himself had not dared to write as boldly"[v] is a very correct statement borne out by the study of the *Leviathan* on the one hand, and the *Theologico-Political Treatise* on the other. Hobbes is more conservative, paradoxical as it may sound, in these matters at any rate, than Spinoza is. But this conservatism is indeed a matter of their speaking, not of their thinking. In other things Spinoza is of course much more conservative than Hobbes, as we will see later. Now let us read the end of the chapter, page 189, paragraph 2 following.

Reader:

> It remains for me to show that between faith or theology and philosophy, there is no connection, nor affinity. I think no one will dispute the fact who has knowledge of the aim and foundations of the two subjects, for they are as wide apart as the poles.
>
> Philosophy has no end in view save truth; faith, as we have abundantly proved, looks for nothing but obedience and piety.

LS: Don't overlook the implication. Faith or theology has nothing to do with truth.

[iv] This formulation appears numerous times in *Leviathan*, but Strauss may be referring here specifically to the final chapter of part 3, chapter 43, "Of what is necessary for a man's reception into the Kingdom of Heaven."

[v] This statement is found in John Aubrey's biography of Hobbes. (See session 1, n. v.) However, some recent readings now have "he out-threw me a bar's length" as opposed to the traditional reading, "he cut through me a bar's length," which Strauss approximates. Aubrey (1626-1697) was a friend of Hobbes and minor writer of the seventeenth century.

Reader:

> Again, philosophy is based on axioms which must be sought from nature alone: faith is based on history and language, and must be sought for only in Scripture and revelation, as we have showed in Chap. VII. Faith, therefore, allows the greatest latitude in philosophic speculation, allowing us without blame to think what we like about anything—

LS: Anything. No holds barred.

Reader:

> and only condemning, as heretics and schismatics, those who teach opinions which tend to produce obstinacy, hatred, strife, and anger; while on the other hand, only considering as faithful those who persuade us, as far as their reason and faculties will permit, to follow justice and charity.
>
> Lastly, as what we are now setting forth are the most important subjects of my treatise, I would most urgently beg the reader, before I proceed, to read these two chapters with especial attention, and to take the trouble to weigh them well in his mind—

LS: Again and again, *etiam atque etiam*.

Reader:

> let him take for granted that I have not written with a view to introducing novelties, but in order to do away with abuses, such as I hope I may, at some future time, at last see reformed. (*TPT*, chap. 14)

LS: You smile. But is it entirely ironical, that he didn't wish to introduce novelties but only to restore certain things?

Student: [inaudible]

LS: Let me see. Look at the heading of chapter 20: "It is shown that in a free commonwealth everyone is entitled to think what he wishes and to say what he thinks." These words are literally taken from Tacitus, the Roman historian.[vi] There are many more quotations from Tacitus and other ancient writers. You must not forget that Spinoza meant this[26] seriously: to restore a freedom which existed in classical antiquity. I have spoken of this prejudice of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries on a former occasion—you know, the belief that there was perfect tolerance or something approaching perfect tolerance in classical antiquity; and only under the influence of the Bible, this tolerance was destroyed. [27]To some extent Spinoza believed that. But we see also here towards the end of the passage which we read that Spinoza admits, if on the basis of revelation, one ultimate limitation of the freedom of opinion. Did you see that? I mean in his final formulation[28]—he doesn't speak of these seven dogmas any more. But what is the indication?

[vi] Cf. Tacitus *Histories* 1.1

Student: The dogma which would lead to hatred and strife.

LS: Let us say anti-social doctrines. And we must see whether this qualification of freedom of speech is ever withdrawn by Spinoza. We understand today—or some of our contemporaries [do]—that freedom of speech [means] freedom to preach any doctrine you please regardless of the consequences, unless it be the doctrine "fire" in an over-crowded picture house. That is a very novel doctrine. And[29] a doctrine, say, encouraging murder or licentious behavior in other respects was of course always regarded as something which must be repressed. That had nothing to do with liberty, that was a thing destructive of liberty. And in this respect Spinoza—let us see whether he comes back to this point. But here at any rate, the one point, regardless of all dogmas, remains: anti-social doctrines cannot be spread.

Student: One brief point. He speaks of the faithful as those able to persuade by means of reason, to justice and charity.[30]

LS: Persuade. Well, *suadere* is not persuade: "who counsel justice and charity".

Student: It seemed there that he was justifying his own faith as a philosopher in contrast to his position before where he had . . .

LS: I see. In other words, a parallel to the permission or obligation to interpret the seven dogmas. You remember the difficulty. The dogmas are those which all honest men must be able to accept. But these dogmas as originally formulated are not acceptable to the philosopher as Spinoza understands him, therefore he gives him the right and even the duty to interpret these dogmas. And something similar—because ultimately the only criterion required is that a man not only acts decently but persuades or teaches decent actions. If he does that he must be tolerated regardless of dogmas.[31] But that is not what Spinoza teaches. The seven dogmas are there.

Student:[32] I was wondering how far the emphasis on teaching by means of reason . . . Because before, the faithful did not have to justify their obedience to reason.

LS: He doesn't say reason. He says "according to the powers of their reason and in accordance with their faculties." That includes also other faculties, like imagination,[33] eloquence, or what have you. Reason is to be preferred, but . . .

Student: As soon as you begin to justify charity through speculation, you end up as Spinoza did by undermining the . . .

LS: But he doesn't say speculation.[34] A subordinate use of reason is admitted by all theologians. That's no problem. And there you have Spinoza as a theologian too. There is no difficulty in that. For example, if you argue about the meaning of a biblical passage, compare it with other passages, this is a rational activity, there is no question about that. And every theologian, [or] almost every theologian, admits the principle of contradiction and the distinction between a legitimate and an illegitimate syllogism. That has nothing to do [with][35] the cognitive status of the premises; that alone is the question. Mr. ____?

Student: Would you be so good as to check the translation on[36] [the] last half of the [penultimate] paragraph of chapter 14?[37]

LS: I must read it, that is an incomplete sentence in Latin. “Faith . . . regards those as faithful who counsel justice and charity according to the powers of their reason and according to their faculties.” That’s literal. But let me translate the whole sentence; maybe there is something in the difficulty you have in mind. First, he has contrasted in the two preceding sentences[38] faith and philosophy[39] [as] opposites. The scope of philosophy differs from the scope of faith, and the foundations of philosophy differ from the foundations of faith.

> Hence faith [and from here on he speak only of faith—LS] concedes to everyone the highest freedom to philosophize, so that he can think what he wishes on anything without committing a crime; and faith condemns only those as heretics and schismatics who teach opinions counseling to contumacy, hatred, contentions and wrath; and faith regards on the other hand those only as faithful who counsel justice and charity according to the powers of their reason and faculties.

So the only thing which I am willing now to grant[40] is that this is a kind of parting shot, not more.[41] If you want to be really effective you have to fall back somehow on reason. That might be implied, because the strange fact is that he speaks here only of faith, and not of faith and philosophy as he did in the preceding sentence. But it is really too subtle or delicate a point, and not important enough to dwell on.

Student: What is the different between persuasion and counseling?

LS: There is lots of difference. In both cases he uses the same word, *suadere*, not *persuadere*. It has a loose meaning, it doesn’t have this special . . . Yes?

Student: This limitation not only includes antisocial action but also feelings, such as anger.

LS: No, opinions.

Student: Wouldn’t anger be . . .

LS: Opinions encouraging men towards these unpeaceful feelings.

Student: Including obstinacy? Would that be necessarily . . .

LS: Well, what he says—those apparently who teach opinions which lead to wrath and hatred and this kind of thing.

Student: Doesn’t this contradict his earlier statement that only actions can be condemned and not the opinions themselves?

LS: Well, that is the difficulty we have been discussing the whole day. Spinoza knows there are no actions without opinions from which they flow. Therefore if you declare [that] only this-and-

this course of action is permitted, you somehow limit the legitimate opinions to the opinions leading up to those actions. Therefore he must have a dogma. But on the other hand, he doesn't want to have a clearly circumscribed dogma limiting freedom of philosophy. That we have seen. This is the kind of tug of war going on. The true point, which he alludes to, is this. Take a course of action. This may follow from very different theoretical premises, obviously. For example, if we pay our income taxes, there may be very different reasons. Someone may pay it only because he says it is very complicated to go downtown and waste the whole afternoon in explaining to the Revenue Service why[42] [he doesn't] want to pay taxes for that. Another may say: No, we must have these highways. Another may even quote the New Testament about rendering to Caesar, and so on. But the same action results: they all lead here; they converge. Therefore, strictly speaking, Spinoza could say: No dogmas, the only thing I am concerned with is[43] [the] result; except such opinions as make impossible the result, [I allow. Those] are the anti-social opinions, they are out, but otherwise[44] [people] are perfectly free. But that he cannot do without flying too much in the face of the Bible. You see, he cannot say that the Bible teaches also atheism. That is a necessity for him. And there is also the theoretical necessity which we must not forget, that he wants, apart from the practical reason, to bring into the open what the real issue between the Bible and philosophy is. You know, that there is a tension between belief in a personal God who exercises particular Providence concerned with man's conduct, and a God who is not a personal God who does not exercise particular Providence, and who does not watch the actions of men, that he also wants to make clear. Therefore the more philosophical treatment. Mr. ____?

Student: Well, the point I was wondering about was the "which tends to" in our translation.

LS: Which "swayed." He doesn't say tend.

Student: In other words, it gives more permission.

LS: No.[45] [More strictly] I would say "which encourage them." "Tend" can embrace things which—no, Spinoza has a stricter notion: "which sway toward, which counsel toward."

Student: At the end of the passage, his political conclusion, his political consideration is put in terms of heretics and schismatics rather than, say, sedition;[46] [he does not] draw a political conclusion from it.)

LS: No. That's theological, up to chapter 15 inclusive. But I am sorry, we have now to turn to the fifteenth chapter, in which it is shown, as he says, that theology must not be the handmaid of reason, nor reason the handmaid of theology and the reason why we persuade ourselves of the authority of Holy Writ. Now the point which he makes here is this: reason cannot be the handmaid of theology and vice versa. He discusses then the problem by taking two Jewish authorities: Maimonides as the one who tries to make theology the handmaid of reason, and Alpakhar, a practically unknown man, who makes reason the handmaid of theology.[vii] We must limit ourselves to reading the most important passages.[47] [Page 194.]

[vii] Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), also known as the Rambam, was one of the most important codifiers of Jewish law, as well as an influential philosopher with his book *Guide of the Perplexed*. Judah Alpakhar (d. 1235), often spelled Alfakhar, was a Spanish Rabbi and important anti-Maimonist of his day. He

Reader:

> We may, therefore, put this theory, as well as that of Maimonides, entirely out of court; and we may take it for indisputable that theology is not bound to serve reason, nor reason theology, but that each has her own domain.
>
> The sphere of reason is, as we have said, truth and wisdom; the sphere of theology is piety and obedience. The power of reason does not extend so far as to determine for us that men may be blessed through simple obedience, without understanding. Theology tells us nothing else, enjoins on us no command save obedience, and has neither the will nor the power to oppose reason.

LS: In other words, what he suggests (and this had a terrific success): here is reason, and here is revelation; they have nothing to do with each other. Nothing. No conflict. But unfortunately truth belongs only here, with reason. Of course what he says in so many words [is that] they have everything in common, namely, the claim to the truth, and they contradict each other in this respect. But he expresses it peacefully by saying they live on different planets. Today of course that is no longer stated in this form, because modern men have become so polite that they don't call a spade a spade anymore. They say religion is a matter of sentiment, that is, a kind of folklore, socially salutary, an important sector of society, as they have come to say, and then there is no conflict. But a religion means to be true. If you disregard the [truth] claim and regard religion as a beautification of life, no conflict arises. But of course that is not religion, that is Madison Avenue. Read, go on.

Reader:

> she defines the dogmas of faith (as we pointed out in the last chapter) only in so far as they may be necessary for obedience, and leaves reason to determine their precise truth: for reason is the light of the mind, and without her all things are dreams and phantoms.

LS: Without which the mind sees nothing but dreams and fictions. But since in revelation reason is not operative, I think it is very clear. Now the next paragraph.

Reader:

> By theology, I here mean, strictly speaking, revelation, in so far as it indicates the object aimed at by Scripture—namely, the scheme and manner of obedience, or the true dogmas of piety and faith. This may truly be called the Word of God, which does not consist in a certain number of books (see Chap. XII.). Theology thus understood, if we regard its precepts or rules of life, will be found in accordance with reason; and if we look to its aim and object, will be seen to be in nowise repugnant thereto, wherefore it is universal to all men. (*TPT*, chap. 15)

LS: Yes. What he is[48] building up now is this. There is perfect harmony between theology and philosophy, after theology has been induced to abandon its claim to truth. That gradually

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maintained an important correspondence with Rabbi David Kimhi, who Spinoza also references in the *TTP*.

disappears, and he moves into a very respectable view: there is perfect harmony between theology and philosophy because the dogma of theology is suprarational. Well, what is suprarational and by definition therefore not contrary to reason, *contra rationem*, is of course also in perfect harmony with reason. What he is doing then is this. That's reason, and that is theology, which is suprarational, and therefore there is no conflict. Then the question arises: But how do we know that it is suprarational and not infrarational, not merely dreams and fictions? Answer: because it has been confirmed by miracles, as every Protestant theologian would say. So the problem has disappeared. That happens in the sequel. Now we read only two more passages, one on page 197, paragraph 2.

Reader:

> Therefore this whole basis of theology and Scripture, though it does not admit of mathematical proof, may yet be accepted with the approval of our judgment.

LS: In other words, we cannot have a strict demonstration of the truth of revelation, but a reasonable one.

Reader:

> It would be folly to refuse to accept what is confirmed by such ample prophetic testimony, and what has proved such a comfort to those whose reason is comparatively weak, and such a benefit to the state; a doctrine, moreover, which we may believe in without the slightest peril or hurt, and should reject simply because it cannot be mathematically proved: it is as though we should admit nothing as true, or as a wise rule of life, which could ever, in any possible way, be called in question; or as though most of our actions were not full of uncertainty and hazard.

LS: He talks like a sensible theologian now.[49] Such writers follow the rule that at the beginning they begin very orthodox. You will remember the first sentence of the *Treatise,* the first chapter: prophecy and revelation is certain knowledge of something which has been revealed by God to man, which everyone would say. And[50] he ends also again orthodox—the beginning and the end—[but] in the middle funny things happen. That has a long history, and it goes back; its obvious parallel you find in discussions about forensic rhetoric. An orator, or an attorney who has to defend a client, what would he do? And the ancient rhetorician Cicero and other people say: Well, the weak spots will be mentioned in the middle because, as everyone knows, the attention is greatest at the beginning and the end—at the beginning, because they are not yet drowsy, you know, they just got in; and at the end because the moment the speaker says "I now come to my conclusion," everyone wakes up. In the middle they discuss, by hook and by crook, you can say, the arguments which are weak, meaning from the point of view of law. And the same thing happens here: what is weak from the point of view of the accepted opinions comes in the middle. That is a very frequent thing in this kind of book. Well, even if you take such a respectable thing as book reviews as distinguished from forensic rhetoric, I have seen scholars (I would not mention their names) who, in reviewing books, read only the table of contents—no, first thing the index,[51] secondly the introduction, and then the conclusion. And then they browse a bit. Well, but the introduction and conclusion they read. You see? So the doctrine which claims

to be the useful doctrine—well, to use the honest expression of Plato, a noble lie. Only the end on page 198, line 8 from bottom.

Reader:

> Before I go further I would expressly state (though I have said it before) that I consider the utility and the need for Holy Scripture or Revelation to be very great. For as we cannot perceive by the natural light of reason that simple obedience is the path of salvation, and are taught by revelation only that it is so by the special grace of God, which our reason cannot attain, it follows that the Bible has brought a very great consolation to mankind. All are able to obey, whereas there are but very few, compared with the aggregate of humanity, who can acquire the habit of virtue under the unaided guidance of reason. Thus if we had not the testimony of Scripture, we should doubt of the salvation of nearly all men. (*TPT*, chap. 15)

LS: That of course is also obviously irony, because from Spinoza's point of view salvation, i.e., the true habit of virtue, cannot be acquired except by reason. But tolerably bad habits agreeable to reason in a certain sphere, the social sphere, can be induced by certain false opinions, which would be salutary opinions. That is what the Bible can give. Whether these opinions are not also socially dangerous from another point of view is another matter. We have seen the example of "Do not resist evil," which is after all a clear New Testament statement, which Spinoza had to do away with because it would not be good for a rational social morality as he understands that.

Now the beginning of the next chapter. Hitherto we have taken care to separate philosophy from theology and to show the liberty of philosophy which theology grants to everyone, and now we turn to the philosophic discussion. He doesn't say this in so many words, but that he means: the theological part is concluded. In a way, you can say we have not yet heard a word about Spinoza's political philosophy, because up to now we have heard only his political theology, which he himself does not regard as the true teaching. But in this distinction a great political problem is already implied, just as if someone who would understand the page in Plato, or half-page in Plato, where he speaks of the noble lie would understand very much of Plato's political philosophy. Although, as Plato does not regard that teaching as true but only as socially necessary, in the same way one gets some reflection of Spinoza's [52]philosophic political teaching in his theological teaching.[53]

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[1] Deleted "In the beginning – and"
[2] Deleted "called"
[3] Deleted "that"
[4] Deleted "latest"
[5] Deleted "the"
[6] Deleted "he says, which"
[7] Deleted "But if it is understood"
[8] Deleted "But I believe it is not merely"
[9] Deleted "of course"
[10] Deleted "on the basis of Spinoza—since"
[11] Deleted "One might"
[12] Deleted "that"
[13] Deleted "Could you tell me? [Student:] Page 180, top. I'm sorry. He says in effect…."
[14] Deleted "that God has"

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[15] Deleted "But you can – that"
[16] Deleted "Spinoza"
[17] Deleted "I forget now the specific formula – the power of God."
[18] Deleted "You see."
[19] Deleted "You see."
[20] Deleted "however"
[21] Deleted "excuse me"
[22] Deleted "the"
[23] Moved "teach"
[24] Deleted "with"
[25] Deleted "that"
[26] Deleted "in a way"
[27] Deleted "you know"
[28] Deleted "what is the – well"
[29] Moved "say"
[30] Deleted "Page 189, next to last paragraph, last sentence"
[31] Deleted "[Student:] I was wondering"
[32] Deleted "No"
[33] Deleted "like"
[34] Deleted "But"
[35] Deleted "regarding"
[36] Deleted "this. This"
[37] Deleted "All right, I will translate it. "Finally the things which we have shown here are the most important things." [Student:] I am sorry. The sentence immediately before that."
[38] Deleted "he has spoken of faith, in the preceding sentence."
[39] Deleted "in"
[40] Deleted "to Mr. __"
[41] Deleted "You know"
[42] Deleted "I didn't"
[43] Deleted "that"
[44] Deleted "they"
[45] Deleted "Stricter"
[46] Deleted "what's that? He does not say? [Student:] Instead of"
[47] Deleted "On page 194, paragraph 5. Wait a second. "I don't have to discuss all these things, but what has been said suffices to show the absurdity; therefore we rejected both that opinion of Maimonides… From there on."
[48] Deleted "trying"
[49] Deleted "But at the end of the discussion – and"
[50] Deleted "then"
[51] Deleted "but"
[52] Deleted "political"
[53] Deleted "Next time Mr. __ will be so good as to read to us his paper."

Session 10: no date

Leo Strauss: [in progress] —when Hobbes took up this subject in the *Leviathan* he made much more nasty remarks than Spinoza ever made. The *Leviathan* was written and published in 1651, under Cromwell, where at least the old heresy laws had been abolished. So[1] any Christian doctrine was permitted—was not a crime, at least. And there Hobbes discussed the problem of [the] trinity, as he says, the three persons of God. But what is a person? A person is a representative according to the older Roman meaning of the term. And that Jesus should be the representative of God is intelligible, and similarly the Holy Ghost would be the Church. But who is the first person of the trinity? Answer: Moses. The representative of God in the old covenant was Moses; hence Moses was the first person in the trinity. And after the Restoration, when he[i] brought out the Latin translation of the *Leviathan*, he has, in the appendix, retracted that because in the meantime the old heresy laws had been restored.[ii] That was a cogent reason for him; and then he admitted it was a bit rash of him. Now there were three points you made.[iii] First, the joke you made about the centenary of the Glorious Revolution: Why in 1959?

Student: This is the two hundred seventy-first anniversary of the landing at Torbay. William III.

LS: Oh, I see. I am sorry. The two hundred seventy-first. So you were, in other words, mathematical.

Student: Well, I thought the revolution wasn't over yet.

LS: Now, what about your remark about the philosopher king? What did you mean by that?

Student: [inaudible]

LS: Whether that is a very relevant remark, I do not know. But we will see. And the last point I didn't understand was when you spoke of the difference between the [inaudible] , you said: But what did the moderns leave unsaid?

Student: What hadn't the moderns left unsaid.

LS: What do you mean?

Student: Exposing the illusions on which society rests, inciting hatred, and so on.

LS: It was an extremely elliptical statement, and I am not sure whether I have fathomed it yet. But let us now turn to our text. But, to repeat, I liked your paper very much.

In the beginning of the sixteenth chapter, if you will turn to that (we read this already last time), he makes it clear that up to this point—I mean, chapters 1 to 15 were theological. This was a

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[i] That is, Hobbes.
[ii] See *Leviathan*, chaps. 41-42 and appendix.
[iii] Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

theological, scriptural investigation, and only now does the philosophic investigation begin, although he does not strictly speaking say that. If you will be so good as to read that sentence, [page 200].

Reader:

> Hitherto our care has been to separate philosophy from theology, and to show the freedom of thought which such separation insures to both.

LS: No, no. Which theology [grants to each][2]. This can refer back only to *theologia*. Yes?

Reader:

> It is now time to determine the limits to which such freedom of thought and discussion may extend itself in the ideal state.

LS: Yes, we will stop here. That ideal is of course one that doesn't really exist, although the word "ideal" existed already in Spinoza's time. You know "ideal" is not a Greek or medieval term; it was coined sometime in the seventeenth century (the adjective), I believe by a gentleman named Lana, if my memory doesn't deceive me.[iv] And I do not know at the moment the incentive of this, but Spinoza used the expression only "the best commonwealth." You see, the question is not simply to establish a universal freedom of philosophizing, of thinking, of judging. How far that freedom extends—there are some limitations. You remember we have discussed this last time. From the biblical point of view there was this limitation set by the seventh dogma.[3] But now we will find theoretical, philosophical discussion of that.

Now the beginning of the argument is in the next paragraph, which is fairly long and we cannot read all these things. Now what is the main point? Spinoza starts from something which he calls *ius institutum naturae*, the right which is instituted has been established by nature. Spinoza begins with the natural right, not with any natural obligation. To use the terminology as it has been simplified or verified by Hobbes, there is natural right and natural law. The natural right precedes the natural law. In Hobbes's scheme that means the fundamental moral fact is a right which each man has to preserve himself. The natural law indicates the moral prerequisite for a successful defense of self-preservation. Successful defense of self-preservation is possible only through peace. Therefore, if we are consistent we have to act in a peaceable manner. The rules of peace are formulated by the natural law. The natural law defines our duties, but these duties are derived from our more fundamental natural right.

This is the precedent for Spinoza, and Spinoza followed it, but not quite. He accepts this, but he leaves that. Why? We have seen in[4] chapter 4 that the divine or natural law is in fact a law which men impose upon themselves. Hobbes also didn't mean anything different by the natural law, a law which man figures out for himself. It has its basis alone in this figuring out. But [whereas] Hobbes is still willing to use the term natural law, Spinoza has ultimately no use for it, and in this respect he is clearer than Hobbes, more explicit than Hobbes. Hobbes had said indeed that the natural law is not strictly speaking a law—he has said that—unless we accept it as occurring

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[iv] *Idealis* in this sense is first recorded around 1610. The attribution to the Jesuit Francesco Lana is from Lessing, according to Franz Harder, *Werden und Wandern unserer Wörter: Etymologische Plauderein*. (Berlin: Heyfelder, 1896).

in the Bible, the word of God. Then,[5] because God is a legislator, it would become a law, but in itself the natural law consists only of conclusions or theories. That is the same as what Spinoza means. Only in Hobbes there is no relation whatever of the so-called natural law to the speculative life of man, to the theoretical life; for Hobbes, the sole basis of natural law is the desire for self-preservation narrowly and strictly understood. Spinoza takes here a much broader view, as will gradually appear.

Now[6] [Spinoza discusses the] natural right of each, of which he gives as an example [that] the fishes are by nature determined to swim and the big ones to swallowing the small ones. Therefore the fishes takes possession, with the highest natural right, of the water, and with the highest natural right do the large ones eat, swallow, the small ones. That is another important difference between Spinoza and Hobbes. In Hobbes's discussion of right and wrong, only man is considered. Spinoza's doctrine covers all beings, and that of course makes it much more difficult for Spinoza to arrive at a specifically human political doctrine at the end, whereas Hobbes's whole notion of right and law is from the outset limited to human things. This right of nature implies of course the right to act with selfishness, that goes without saying. The fishes are not charitable, and it is not fundamentally different in the case of men. Therefore charity has no ground in this ultimate basis. There is one point in this section which I shall translate: "And since it is the highest law of nature that every being attempts to persevere in its status as much as it can, and without any regard to anything else, with regard only to itself."[v] That is the highest law of nature, the law of absolute selfishness. How can you bring in charity? That is from the outset excluded and only a shadow of charity can come in, which indeed takes place. In the sequel he explains. What he says can be said very simply, as he states it: Right is might. By nature there is nothing which can seriously be called right.

But why does he use this: Right is might? There is no right.[7] It is one thing to say there is no right by nature, but another thing is to say might is right. Why not say that [it]'s neutral, [that] right or wrong doesn't apply to that at all? What's the reason for that? Well, the reason explicitly given by Spinoza is that the highest ground is God. And God's absolute power—to use the present-day jargon—[is] the point of convergence of fact and value. And since this is so, everything derivative from God is not merely a fact but is for this reason necessarily also valua[tive]. Might is right. But behind it is the notion of—a kind of enthusiastic admiration for everything that is. We will perhaps find some examples of that later. The crucial practical consequence is of course that there is an equal right of the wise and the fool: the wise has the same right to live rationally as a fool has to live irrationally. Why? Because no one can help desiring what he desires. The wise cannot help desiring sensible things and the fool cannot help desiring foolish things. The necessity of everything takes away the possibility of reasonable blame. If everything is fully determined—you see this every day in every law court in the United States where a man committed a dastardly murder and the lawyer for the defense, with the help of some sociologists and psychiatrists, proves that he couldn't help murdering his mother because his mother nagged him. He couldn't help it. What cannot be helped cannot be legally blamed: universal law. There you have it. Desire is determined.

There are some things we should read on page 201, paragraph 2.

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[v] This famous *conatus* doctrine of Spinoza can be found in *Ethics* III Propositions 6ff. and is one of the core elements of Spinoza's theory of individuals.

Reader:

> That is, as the wise man has sovereign right to do all that reason dictates, or to live according to the laws of reason, so also the ignorant and foolish man has sovereign right to do all that desire dictates, or to live according to the laws of desire. This is identical with the teaching of Paul, who acknowledges that previous to the law—that is, so long as men are considered as living under the sway of nature, there is no sin.
>
> The natural right of the individual man—

LS: Not the individual: every human being.

Reader:

> of every human being is thus determined, not by sound reason, but by desire and power. All are not naturally conditioned so as to act according to the laws and rules of reason; nay, on the contrary, all men are born ignorant, and before they can learn the right way of life and acquire the habit of virtue, the greater part of their life, even if they have been well brought up, has passed away. Nevertheless, they are in the meanwhile bound to live and preserve themselves as far as they can by the unaided impulses of desire. Nature has given them no other guide, and has denied them the present power of living according to sound reason; so that they are not more bound to live by the dictates of an enlightened mind, than a cat is bound to live by the laws of the nature of a lion.

LS: And therefore they are not more bound to live by the laws of a sane mind. The laws of a sane mind, that is Spinoza's substitution for what was traditionally called the natural law, and which he refuses to call the natural law. In other words, Spinoza knows that there are certain rules of conduct traditionally called natural law, but he denies that they can legitimately be called a natural law. He calls them laws of a sound mind. Why does there exist an equal right of the wise and the fool? Because desire is determined. A law addressed to the fool, "Act reasonably," doesn't find an addressee. That is a part of the general criticism which was formulated by Hobbes before. Natural law as it was traditionally understood is ineffectual, and that is a sign that it is not natural, which also is taken up later by Locke. Let us read the immediate sequel.

Reader:

> Whatsoever, therefore, an individual (considered as under the sway of nature) thinks useful for himself, whether led by sound reason or impelled by the passions, that he has a sovereign right to seek and to take for himself as he best can, whether by force, cunning, entreaty, or any other means; consequently he may regard as an enemy anyone who hinders the accomplishment of his purpose.

LS: You see, no holds barred. Machiavelli himself never stated it so universally. We must see this and understand it in order to see how Spinoza is trying to solve the political problem on this basis. Yes?

Reader:

> It follows from what we have said that the right and ordinance of nature, under which all men are born, and under which they mostly live, only prohibits such things as no one desires, and no one can attain: it does not forbid strife, nor hatred, nor anger, nor deceit, nor, indeed, any of the means suggested by desire.
>
> This we need not wonder at, for nature is not bounded by the laws of human reason, which aims only at man's true benefit and preservation; her limits are infinitely wider, and have reference to the eternal order of nature, wherein man is but a speck; it is by the necessity of this alone that all individuals are conditioned for living and acting in a particular way. If anything, therefore, in nature seems to us ridiculous, absurd, or evil, it is because we only know in part, and are almost entirely ignorant of the order and interdependence of nature as a whole, and also because we want everything to be arranged according to the dictates of our human reason; in reality that which reason considers evil, is not evil in respect to the order and laws of nature as a whole, but only in respect to the laws of our reason. (*TPT*, chap. 16)

LS: Laws of our nature. You see, to understand that when man complains about how evil nature is, plagues and the earthquakes and whatnot, there was always an old answer by the philosophers, and not only by the philosophers: that you cannot look at this phenomenon from a merely human point of view. There would not be a universe and therefore man if there [were] not such possibilities as those of earthquakes and plagues and so on. Spinoza radicalizes that: what is true of earthquakes [and] plagues is true of vice as well. Vice and stupidity and everything evil is as much a part of the natural order as the so-called natural evils, and we must not look at vice merely from a human point of view. We must[8] do that [as well]—that's where politics comes in—but the higher consideration is not the anthropocentric orientation but the cosmos and a rigorous theoretical orientation. That is the point he wants[9] to make [here]. And by nature, to repeat, everything is permitted. Natural law is based on a merely human distinction. This reminds of the statement of Heraclitus to which I referred in the other course.[vi] For God, everything—from God's point of view, everything is just, but men have made a supposition that some things are just and others unjust. In other words, Spinoza returns to this extent to a pre-Socratic point of view, but the particular way in which he does it is his own.

Now this much should be clear by now. Therefore, we arrive at the question: How can we get any limitation? One thing is clear. The limitation must be based on some desire, on some powerful and effective desire, otherwise it would be mere ineffectual exhortation. And that we must find. Now we have the seen the references to the human good, to true human utility. That would seem to be the solution to the problem. It is as follows. Man is only a part of the whole, and just one part among many. But man has a certain constitution, and certain things are useful to man and others are harmful. Say, peace is useful; war—civil wars, rather, are harmful. We devise then the right order of human life, individually and collectively, from the human good. For practical purposes that would seem to be sufficient, but why did Spinoza make this fairly long introduction by which he warns us of the fact that this human realm is such a tiny realm within the whole and therefore cannot give us the ultimate point of view? You remember he had

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[vi] During the same quarter, Strauss was teaching a course on Plato's *Symposium*.

said something about the true human good in chapter 4, when he spoke of the divine law. So why does he not leave it at this? Why does he enlarge the perspective so that he must observe right is might? What is the reason for that?

Student: Would this be part of man's intellectual understanding of God?

LS: Yes, sure. But still why, if man's perfection consists in his intellectual love of God and all rules of conduct individually and collectively ultimately have to be derived from that, why does he not begin with that? Why begin in such a supra-Machiavellian manner?

Student: Is he addressing philosophers?

LS: That is in the right direction, but it is not precise enough.

Student: He could wish to prevent individual sects from . . .

LS: No. You see, these sects are ruled out by the new beginning, philosophically. Their specific premise—some understanding of Scripture—is abandoned by the fact that Scripture is no longer the basis of the argument. But what Mr. ___ says points to the right answer. This truly human good is a preserve of a tiny minority. A moral-political teaching must be concerned with the other human beings, with the multitude who will not be inspired to virtuous action by the true good. How can they be induced to limit their desires? And that is the question which he takes up in the immediate sequel. We have up to now no limits, unlimited desire. But how can we get limitations? Read the immediate sequel, [page 202].

Reader:

> Nevertheless, no one can doubt that it is much better for us to live according to the laws and assured dictates of reason, for, as we said, they have men's true good for their object. Moreover, everyone wishes—

LS: "Moreover." That is a new consideration. That has no longer to do with man's true good. That refers us back to chapter 4.

Reader:

> Moreover, everyone wishes to live as far as possible securely beyond the reach of fear, and this would be—

LS: One should really underline in one's mind the word "wishes"—or "desires" would be better. Everyone actually desires; that is not something I preach to you, that is *in* man. There is no one that does not desire.

Reader:

> Everyone desires to live as far as possible securely beyond the reach of fear, and this would be quite impossible so long as everyone did everything he liked, and reason's claim was lowered to a par with those of hatred and anger; there is no

> one who is not ill at ease in the midst of enmity, hatred, anger, and deceit, and who does not seek to avoid them as much as he can.

LS: In other words, regardless of any notion of the true human good. He doesn't like conditions in which he can't pass [along] the street without looking over his shoulder for the next fellow pointing a gun at him.

Reader:

> When we reflect that men without mutual help, or the aid of reason, must needs live most miserably, as we clearly proved in Chap. V., we shall plainly see that men must necessarily come to an agreement to live together as securely and well as possible if they are to enjoy as a whole the rights which naturally belong to them as individuals, and their life should be no more conditioned by the force and desire of individuals, but by the power and will of the whole body.

LS: Now let us stop here for a moment. So only a few seek, desire, effectively man's true good. But all men equally fear to be killed. All men equally would prefer greater comfort to smaller comfort. Whether that is true empirically is another question, but that is Spinoza's argument. Here we have another basis which appeals not to the true rational goal, but to a universal goal which as such is subrational. One does not have to be a truly rational being to seek that. Here we get a restraining element for might equal to right, for natural right, and this is one which is effective, which doesn't have to be preached. Go on.

Reader:

> This end they will be unable to attain if desire be their only guide (for by the laws of desire each man is drawn in a different direction); they must, therefore, most firmly decree and establish that they will be guided in everything by reason (which nobody will dare openly to repudiate lest he should be taken for a madman), and will restrain any desire which is injurious to a man's fellows, that they will do to all as they would be done by, and that they will defend their neighbor's rights as their own.

LS: Yes, the mere dictate of reason—that is the term which he uses—demands consideration for others. In other words, you want to live in a state of security and reasonable comfort, but you destroy that if you follow all your appetites as they emerge in you. How can you expect the unreasonable multitude even to do this much thinking, that they say "I want to live in convenience and not to be killed at every opportunity," that they put two and two together and say "Therefore I myself have to behave in a decent way"? Therefore this rational compact of rational men will not suffice: the passions must be enlisted in addition. Let me restate it, to make it quite clear. For the truly rational man, the philosopher or the wise man, there is a rational good and the knowledge of this rational good induces them to enter society and be good citizens. But then there is a good which I will now call subrational, by which I do not mean that it is irrational but [that] it is only a very small part of the story: the desire for security and comfort, nothing else.[10] But still, even on the basis of this subrational good I can think rationally. That is what they are trying to do in economics and social science generally; they take almost any good and think rationally about the means to that good. But here Spinoza comes with another

consideration. [That] these fools, even if they can understand that they should act in a certain way—pay their taxes honestly and whatnot in order to get the subrational good—won't do it. You need in addition support by their passions. Now what are these passions? In the immediate sequel, [page 203].

Reader:

> How such a compact as this should be entered into, how ratified and established, we will now inquire.
>
> Now it is a universal law of human nature that no one ever neglects anything which he judges to be good, except with the hope of gaining a greater good, or from the fear of a greater evil; nor does anyone endure an evil except for the sake of avoiding a greater evil, or gaining a greater good. That is, everyone will, of two goods, choose that which he thinks the greatest; and, of two evils, that which he thinks the least, for it does not necessarily follow that he judges right. This law is so deeply implanted in the human mind that it ought to be counted among eternal truths and axioms.

LS: Yes, the eternal verities. But what Spinoza is driving at is, then, this. The passions which have to be enlisted are hope and fear. In the sequel it appears that it is fear above all. The social compact is kept through fear of the evil consequences of the breach and not simply by the prospect of the good consequences of keeping the contract. Now how does this fear of evil consequences of the breach work empirically? What well-known fact is he alluding to?

Student: Police?

LS: Yes, but more: Gallows. Fear of punishment. These fools need in addition fear of punishment, and the mere rationality of the command, even with a view to their subrational good, would not help. They need in addition fear of punishment. But here in this connection a difficulty already arises, namely, what you can achieve by such means as punishment—and effective and spectacular punishments, a favorite theme of Machiavelli, must be done with aplomb and not behind closed doors of a prison yard to be truly effective. Why can one not do that another way? Why can one not do it with a fictitious fear, a fictitiously created fear, you know—superstition, in other words? That is a problem which we must keep in mind although Spinoza does not yet speak of it here. That is in chapters 16 and 17. In chapter 17 he will discuss the solution of the whole problem based on religious beliefs. Here it is only of the strictly natural and pungent. We skip the immediate sequel. "If all men could be easily guided." Do you have that? [Page 204.]

Reader:

> However, if all men could be easily led by reason alone, and could recognize what is best and most useful for a state, there would be no one who would not forswear deceit—

LS: But I want it more literal: out of the desire for this highest good. "Highest good" is a traditional term which Spinoza reserves in a traditional way for the intellectual love of God, but

here he says *this* highest good, namely, that highest good which even the non-philosophers can understand, because for their subrational good—security plus comfort—the preservation of the commonwealth is the highest good. Let us read then the sequel.

Reader:

> for everyone would keep most religiously to their compact in their desire for the chief good, namely, the preservation of the state, and would cherish good faith above all things as the shield and buckler of the commonwealth.

LS: You see this disgraceful fellow. In one case he translates "commonwealth," which is a correct translation for *res publica*; in the other case he says "the state." Why does he do that? Because he is brought up in that childish belief: good style demands variation of expression, which is sheer nonsense. In a scientific consideration it is of course necessary to use the most proper expression and not change it for no reason. And secondly, even in a high style, repetition can of course not[11] [involve] change of expression; it can be very desirable, naturally. These silly things. Go on.

Reader:

> However, it is far from being the case that all men can always be easily led by reason alone; everyone is drawn away by his pleasure, while avarice, ambition, envy, hatred, and the like so engross the mind that reason has no place therein. Hence, though men make promises with all the appearances of good faith, and agree that they will keep to their engagement, no one can absolutely rely on another man's promise unless there is something behind it. Everyone has by nature a right to act deceitfully, and to break his compacts, unless he be restrained by the hope of some greater good, or the fear of some greater evil.
>
> However, as we have shown that the natural right of the individual is only limited by his power, it is clear that by transferring, either willingly or under compulsion, this power into the hands of another, he in so doing necessarily cedes also a part of his right; and further, that the sovereign right over all men belongs to him who has sovereign power, wherewith he can compel men by force, or restrain them by threats of the universally feared punishment of death; such sovereign right he will retain only so long as he can maintain his power of enforcing his will; otherwise he will totter on his throne, and no one who is stronger than he will be bound unwillingly to obey him. (*TPT*, chap. 16)

LS: You see then the fear of capital punishment and therefore also the fear of lesser punishment[12]: this is the foundation of this society, the fear of capital punishment, just as [for] Hobbes fear of violent death, the strongest passion, is the only solid basis of a civil society. The sensible men are induced by the positive advantage of society to behave like good citizens, but those who are not sensible can only be terrified into doing what is for their own subrational good, security, and comfort. But here again I remind you: fear of capital punishment, as Hobbes has pointed out in his *Leviathan*, very clearly can be balanced and overbalanced by fear of eternal punishment after death, and therefore the whole question of conflict between theology and purely philosophic policy remains. Since men are so irrational there is need for establishing a sovereign.

Spinoza refers to that in rather sweeping terms for the simple reason that he can presuppose the long deductions of Hobbes. But he follows here Hobbes: there must be one man or body of men in whose hands is the whole power. That is the condition of peace. But then he makes a qualification which distinguishes him from Hobbes at least by making it with this precision, namely, the right of the sovereign alone is not sufficient. They must also really possess that right and exercise it effectually, and that is not yet given with the mere right. In other words, the political consideration as distinguished from the merely legal consideration is more powerful in Spinoza. That is the reason why Spinoza praises Machiavelli so highly, whereas he neglects respect for Hobbes. Machiavelli hadn't cared about the legal machinery by which this is done; he was concerned with the acts of power. Spinoza also says they are ultimately decisive. We come to that later. Therefore, Spinoza says in that letter which we read in the first meeting: I keep the right of nature intact.[vii] Hobbes does not keep it intact. Why? The equation of right and might—that is, the right of nature—persists in civil society. The absolute right of the sovereign stands and falls with this absolute might. If he does not have that might, his absolute right, legal right, is senseless. Hobbes did not entirely disagree with that but he didn't state it as forcefully as Spinoza did.

The immediate question arises naturally. You have then one man and body of men who have all the power. Is not life under Nero as undesirable from the power of view of security and comfort as life in a desert? It is a serious question. I mean, it is not a foregone conclusion that life in a desert would be worse that a life under Nero; therefore Spinoza has to show under what conditions this transfer of right and might is reasonable both from the point of view of the philosopher, who is concerned with the rational good, and the point of view of the many, who are concerned with the subrational good. I hope I have made clear this distinction. I mean subrational good, by which I do not mean an irrational good but where it is only security and comfort and not the positive goal of man, intellectual love of God. Now let's read the answer in the sequel, [page 205].

Reader:

> In this manner a society can be formed without any violation of natural right—

LS: You see what he means by natural right: in perfect accord with the principle "right is might." That doesn't mean more. It doesn't mean legitimate.

Reader:

> and the covenant can always be strictly kept—that is, if each individual hands over the whole of his power to the body politic—

LS: To society. Why does he say that?

Reader:

> the latter will then possess sovereign natural right over all things; that is, it will have sole and unquestioned domination, and everyone will be bound to obey, under pain of the severest punishment.

[vii] Letter 50, to Jellis.

LS: No, no. Everyone will be bound to obey either from a free mind or from fear of the highest punishment. The sensible men are the first who obey from a free mind. They realize clearly. The others will be afraid of the gallows.

Reader:

> The sovereign power is not restrained by any laws, but everyone is bound to obey it in all things—

LS: Notice that. That is a strict doctrine of sovereignty, of course. The sovereign is not bound by any law, otherwise he wouldn't be the sovereign. Where do you find this in the United States Constitution? The very beginning: the people. The people gave that Constitution, and he who can do something can also undo it. That practically disappears in a modern constitutional democracy, but the[13] fundamental notion comes out.

Reader:

> such is the state of things implied when men either tacitly or expressly handed over to it all their power of self-defense, or in other words, all their right. For if they had wished to retain any right for themselves, they ought to have taken precautions for its defense and preservation—

LS: They would have had to reserve some rights for themselves effectively.

Reader:

> as they have not done so, and indeed could not have done so without dividing and consequently ruining the state, they placed themselves absolutely at the mercy of the sovereign power; and, therefore, having acted (as we have shown) as reason and necessity demanded, they are obliged to fulfill the commands of the sovereign power, however absurd these may be, else they will be public enemies, and will act against reason, which urges the preservation of the state as a primary duty. For reason bids us choose the least of two evils.

LS: So in other words, [although] Spinoza[14] develop[s] this more in the sequel,[15] he indicates already the solution. Men living decently together is impossible if there is not a sovereign power, a power not subject to anyone or anything. The argument is partly implied because, as I said, Hobbes had developed it:[16] if there were not a sovereign power from which there is no appeal, there would be no legal solution to controversies. There must be a judge from which there is no appeal, and such a judge is the sovereign judge. Why the sovereign judge must also be the legislator and the executor, we cannot go into now.

So Spinoza accepts the strict doctrine of sovereignty without any qualification. The solution to the difficulty indicated by the word "Nero" is democracy: give the full sovereignty to the people and then there is nothing to fear. If the sovereign commands the most absurd things, you, even as a rational man who is not afraid of punishment, have to obey it. No excuses are possible such as natural law or divine law. That he will develop later. The positive law is the highest law; there is no other. That is a terrible condition, except in a democracy. The sovereignty is not only bearable but salutary in a democracy. Part of the story is, as will partly appear in Spinoza's argument, that

in a democracy you are a part of the sovereign. In a monarchy you are not a part of the sovereign. And since no one voluntarily hurts himself, the parts of the sovereign are not likely to harm the parts of the sovereign. Stated generally, it sounds to be the solution but we will later on see what the difficulty is. I will mention later on an amazing number of parallels with Rousseau. Rousseau develops this much more fully and clearly, but the fundamental problem is the same. Democracy is sovereign. A democracy does not obey any law or anyone. Therefore, we have seen, that decides already the issue of religion. Religion is obedience, as we have seen. The sovereign does not obey. The sovereign chooses, say, the Bible. That is not obedience; he chooses. Behind the argument is always this, you see: the alternative is chaos. Full sovereignty or chaos. The dangers of sovereignty are avoided if sovereignty is only sovereignty of the people. Spinoza had said at the beginning of the chapter that he will speak of the freedom of thinking in the best commonwealth. He seems now to suggest the best commonwealth is a democracy. We must see to what extent this is true. Let us follow the immediate sequel, [page 205].

Reader:

> Furthermore, this danger of submitting absolutely to the dominion and will of another, is one which may be incurred with a light heart: for we have shown that sovereigns only possess this right of imposing their will, so long as they have the full power to enforce it: if such power be lost their right to command is lost also, or lapses to those who have assumed it and can keep it. Thus it is very rare for sovereigns to impose thoroughly irrational commands, for they are bound to consult their own interests, and retain their power by consulting the public good and acting according to the dictates of reason, as Seneca says, "*violenta imperia nemo continuit diu*." No one can long retain a tyrant's sway.

LS: Now that is of course a pious hope. Even if the time includes only twelve years, as for example Hitler did,[viii] that is quite a long time for his contemporaries. And in addition, to beat Spinoza with his own weapon: in the preface he speaks of the Turkish empire as a tyrannical empire and he admits that this lasted for centuries, lasted even centuries after his death. So this comforting statement of Seneca is of no practical use. It comes from a tragedy of Seneca; I did not take the trouble, I am sorry to say, to look it up, but we know that tragedies usually contain the opinions not of the author but of a character, a person in the play, and we would have to see in what situation, by a man of what wisdom, this remark was said before we accuse Seneca of that error.[ix] Seneca, you know, was himself a victim of Nero. So that is an argument without any power, of course.[17] But[18] [it] applies of course to all regimes, not to democracy in particular. [Now the next point.] In the next section he speaks of democracy. [Page 206.]

Reader:

> In a democracy, irrational commands are still less to be feared: for it is almost impossible that the majority of a people, especially if it be a large one, should agree in an irrational design:

LS: In one irrationality, in one absurdity. What do you say to that?

[viii] 1933-1945. The Enabling Act passed in March 1933 made Hitler the virtual dictator of Germany. He became Führer in July 1934. Hitler died by suicide in April 1945.

[ix] Seneca, *Trojan Women* 258-9. The verse is spoken by Agamemnon to Pyrrhus.

Student: How about the onslaught in Russia? Hitler's invasion of Russia?

LS: Yes, but that was not a decision of a sovereign German people. You cannot say that.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: True and genuine agreement is possible only in the truth, and therefore the more people who are remote from the truth the less can there be agreement among them. That is the argument. But of course Spinoza's conclusion doesn't follow. In other words, if each individual were left to his own devices in a voting booth without any preparation whatever,[19] each would come up with perhaps a crazy idea of his own. Sure. But that is not the way in which political decisions are reached. What happens?

Student: You play off both ends against the middle.

LS: Yes, but there is one particular human type who becomes so important for crystallizing opinion so that quite a few can agree in one absurdity. These individuals were formerly called demagogues or[20] orators. That was the key point of Hobbes against democracy: he said democracy is the rule of the demagogues, of the orators. So that is not a very good argument, it seems, up to this point. Now the next point.

Reader:

> and, moreover, the basis and aim of a democracy is to avoid the desires as irrational, and to bring men as far as possible under the control of reason, so that they may live in peace and harmony: if this basis be removed the whole fabric falls to ruin.

LS: What do you say to this argument? Democracy is the only regime, Spinoza says, which has a rational goal. And even if it is only that subrational goal, one could say most men in their senses would prefer security plus comfort to insecurity and misery. Whereas in a monarchy, the end might actually be the selfish interest of the monarch without any regard for the welfare of the people, in a democracy that could not be. That is true. But what does Spinoza overlook here?

Student: If this reasonable basis is removed the practical ruin would be pretty bad.

LS: Sure, that is clear. But what is the difficulty?

Student: Well, how does one determine now what is conducive to order and harmony and peace? The factions in a democracy may come to the wrong conclusion as to what promotes order.

LS: Sure. In other words, the judgment regarding the means is not guaranteed by agreement regarding a perfectly sensible end, and therefore this is a very weak argument.

Reader:

> Such being the ends in view for the sovereign power, the duty of subjects is, as I have said, to obey its commands, and to recognize no right save that which it sanctions.
>
> It will, perhaps, be thought that we are turning subjects into slaves: for slaves obey commands and free men live as they like . . .

LS: You see that is a kind of remembrance of the premodern people who resolved that the modern doctrine of sovereignty . . . [x]

Reader:

> but this idea is based on a misconception, for the true slave is he who is led away by his pleasures and can neither see what is good for him nor act accordingly: he alone is free who lives with free consent under the entire guidance of reason.

LS: Wonderful. That is wonderful. But we are concerned with the many who are not rational. Merely by obeying the government Spinoza says one acts rationally, implying [that is so] even if the government commands most foolish things, because the alternative would be chaos, anarchy. But why do men obey the government if they admit it is only for fear of punishment? Not rational men. What about them? Let us go on. [Page 206]

Reader:

> Action in obedience to orders does take away freedom in a certain sense, but it does not, therefore, make a man a slave, all depends on the object of the action. If the object of the action be the good of the state, and not the good of the agent, the latter is a slave and does himself no good: but in a state or kingdom where the weal of the whole people and not that of the ruler, is the supreme law, obedience to the sovereign power does not make a man a slave, of no use to himself, but a subject. Therefore, that state is the freest whose laws are founded on sound reason, so that every member of it may, if he will, be free; that is, live with full consent under the entire guidance of reason. (*TPT*, chap. 16)

LS: Now let us see that. What he says is that in a democracy the laws are made by the people for the people; therefore no fear that there could be oppression of the people—therefore no fear that there could be oppression of the people because that is unthinkable, that the people would enact the law against the people. But there is a difficulty to which we referred before: the need for judgment. The people's very intention toward the people—but does it always have sound judgment? The best republic is that where laws are founded on sane reasons. In such a republic, to be a subject is identical with being a truly free man. In such a republic, in obeying the law I obey myself, as Rousseau put it. Surely, if the law is rational it tells me to do what I want to do as a rational man. There is strictly speaking no obedience involved, but[21] Spinoza evades the issue because he has here to prove the best republic, [the] best commonwealth. Democratic laws are necessarily rational laws. Later on Rousseau stated the problem as follows: The general will cannot err. The general will, meaning the will of the people as a political unity, cannot err.

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[x] There is a break in the tape at this point.

Wonderful. Every popular decision is rational. That cannot be true, and Rousseau in the sequel admits that. He says the people want to do good to themselves, as each individual wants to do good to himself, but it doesn't always know what is good for itself. So we still have to solve that. Yes?

Student: If you take Spinoza's argument and change the word irrational to immoderate or extreme—

LS: Which is the same thing.

Student: Well, that's the point. Then when he makes something of an argument for democracy using his types of arguments, an argument for democracy in the sense that since you will have conflicting groups, none of which will be reconciled to any extreme, in [such] a democracy you are more inclined to come up with moderate or—and of course this is a confusion of moderate and middle way, but still one which is often valid, and you still—

LS: No, no. I wouldn't say that.

Student: You would say that you would more often come up with moderate forces of behavior than in a tyranny, where one person governs and hence can go completely to an extreme of any sort. And I think this is the sense in which he is saying democracy is best.

LS: Yes, but that leads of course also to other difficulties. This great advantage of democracy, which means also very cumbersome procedures, is of course also a great handicap in critical situations where quick decisions are needed. But let us first follow Spinoza's argument and we will read now the note to this which you will find in the appendix.[22] [The] note[23] was written later and published from Spinoza's handwriting after his death, partly from a Latin work and partly from French.

Reader:

> Whatever be the social state a man finds himself in, he may be free.

LS: Literally, in whatever state a man is he can be free.

Reader:

> For certainly a man is free, in so far as he is led by reason. Now reason (though Hobbes thinks otherwise) is always on the side of peace, which cannot be attained unless the general laws of the state be respected. Therefore the more a man is led by reason—in other words, the more he is free, the more constantly will he respect the laws of his country, and obey the commands of the sovereign power to which he is subject. (Note 27)

LS: Now this is a very difficult note, and I believe it was penned very hastily[24] but the tendency is clear. What Spinoza is working toward is that the rule of reason is identical with democracy. That is what democracy originally [was] meant to be and all these [later] reactions[25], by the Czar and such people, are directed against this older meaning. "Democracy is the best regime" means

"democracy is the rational regime," and the rational regime is one in which reason rules. For essentially, people are not concerned with what Max Weber might have said.[xi]

And so the rule of reason equal to democracy equal to rule of the people. I try to bring out now the paradox. How could the rule of reason be identical with the rule of the people traditionally regarded as the repository of unreason, or surely of a defective reason? That is the paradox of the problem, and Spinoza tries to solve it. In this note he brings out the difficulty in the first sentence: in whichever state a man is, he can be free. The truly free man, the rational man, the man who is concerned with the rational good and ultimately with intellectual love of God, can live in every state. True rationality is indifferent to the difference of regimes. He does not necessarily need democracy. The rational life does not need democracy. Nor, on the other side, does democracy guarantee rationality, as we have seen before. That is the difficulty.[26] This equation which Spinoza and after him Rousseau tried to establish is a very great problem, [but] it doesn't mean that it doesn't contain an important grain of salt. And that is of course the true justification of democracy, but as it is stated it is not evident. One has to go much more into details than even Rousseau went in order to show what this rationality is. And of course one would have to bring in the element which was surely neglected by Spinoza and also less neglected by Rousseau, [namely],[27] the question of the essential limitations of democracy which make democracy a liberal democracy. The limitation, what is in the American Constitution the Bill of Rights,[28] [is] the limitation of this sovereign rule. Here [there] is only one point I would like to make because it is one of the rare references, one of the two references of Spinoza to Hobbes. What does he mean by that?[29] Notice, Hobbes speaks differently. Reason suggests peace always, universally.

Student: Hobbes had argued that reason in the state of nature dictated the war of all men against all men.

LS: Yes, but does Spinoza deny that in the state of nature rational man doesn't have the right to fight?

Student: He has the right but his reason would not dictate that he use that right. He simply has it.

LS: What is that? I mean, he has the right to repel an aggressor but he would not repel the aggressor. That is surely not what Spinoza has in mind.

Student: Well, you are speaking of repelling an aggressor; here reason would dictate peace in the sense of repel the aggressor if you can't get peace, but I don't think reason for Spinoza would dictate a war to take somebody else's property.

LS: No, surely not.[30] What you say is what the literal meaning would suggest,[31] [but] I would say[32] the issue doesn't exist [there]; in fact, if you consider Hobbes's doctrine properly and Spinoza's doctrine properly there is no difference between them here. I regard it as possible that

[xi] Max Weber (1864-1920) was an extremely influential sociologist and political economist whose views of liberalism and democracy were often controversial. Strauss's comment here is opaque but may have been prompted by the publication the same year as this course of Wolfgang Mommsen's provocative interpretation *Max Weber und die deutsche Politik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1959).

this is inserted in the wrong place—I mean, you know when you write hastily you may very well do that—and that he has in mind a real difference, an important difference between Hobbes and Spinoza, and that concept is the concept of freedom. For Spinoza, freedom is identical with rationality. In Hobbes's definition of freedom rationality doesn't occur. I don't have here the *Leviathan*. Chapter 21 is the key chapter on this subject, but what is the definition of freedom given by Hobbes? Freedom is the absence of external impediments.[xii] I am free when not chained. If I can circulate freely I am free, and even the later refinements given in that chapter never link up freedom with rationality. And that is indeed a crucial difference, and therefore I believe the parenthesis is somehow through Spinoza's haste in the wrong place. Yes?

Student: Doesn't Spinoza in fact put much greater emphasis on man's rationality than does Hobbes?

LS: Sure. That is the point for Spinoza. You see, that is the point; that is the key to the understanding of the peculiar character of Hobbes and Spinoza's doctrine in contradistinction to Hobbes. He accepts this whole doctrine with regard to the state of nature, with regard to the primacy of right, with regard to the absolute power of the sovereign. That he accepts, with minor verbal deviations which are interesting. The difference concerns the conception of the highest good. What does Hobbes teach regarding the highest good?

Student: Life?

LS: No, no. He was too realistic for that. He knew that we can have life and be very miserable at the same time.

Student: Peace?

LS: No.

Student: Freedom from fear?

LS: There ain't no highest good. Literally. Let me say it in proper English: there is no highest good according to Hobbes. Explicit. There is a *summum malum*, a highest evil. There's that, but there is no highest good. There is a greatest good—that is not the same as a highest good. The greatest good is the progress from satisfaction of desire to satisfaction of desire. A continuous progress in this time is happiness; but this of course is unfortunately cut off by death. And you see there is never a stop to it, there is never an end. There cannot be a highest good. Hobbes denies that. Spinoza is in this respect old fashioned. There is a highest good and the highest good consists in contemplation. For Hobbes contemplation is—well, some people like to think; some people are curious, intellectually curious. You know, [it is] one of the many idiosyncrasies which men have, only this is a particularly interesting one because so much depends on it, including the true science of politics. But Hobbes always rejected the contemplative ideal, and Spinoza restores it and therefore he also restores a much more lofty morality than Hobbes would ever have admitted. There is a subtle connection between this more lofty morality of Spinoza and his

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[xii] *Leviathan*, chap. 14.

sympathy for free government, for democracy. But that is complicated, certainly not so simple. The simple formula is only a statement of the problem, it is not the answer. Mr. ____?

Student: Reading something of Max Weber in which I can't get any notion of rationality straight, it seems to me that there is a close parallel between his notion of the relation between rationality and law, which he seems to be saying, at least says at times, that all law is rational.

LS: *Modern* law.

Student: I'm sorry, modern law. But this distinction between formal and substantive rationality is precisely the difficulty I have, and I wonder does it have its birth somehow in Spinoza? Spinoza seems to say all law is rational and yet . . .

LS: I think that is really a difficult late nineteenth-century problem which arose from the complete acceptance of legal positivism in the first place, and in order [that] there is no natural law whatever. Secondly, there is a science of that law—the law has an inner order—and there are perfectly lucid rules of interpretation. One crucial point in the argument between the natural law people and the positivists was this: that the natural law people said there is no positive law which doesn't have lacunae, whereas positive law doesn't desire that, and therefore appeal must be made to a higher law. The positivists said there are no lacunae. The law is a body, an organism, which has in itself the means for completion. So if a new case arises not provided for by the original legislator, the available rules of interpretation enable the judge to figure out a decision. There is never a need to condemn the positive law. The self-sufficiency of the positive law is surely one point. Positivism is essential to Weber, for example, when he speaks of "Kadi justice"[xiii] . . . This fellow follows certain rules of equity and is not absolutely bound by the law and the legal rules of interpretation. The Western counterpart would have a perfectly rational argument to justify his decision, formally rational.

Student:[33] Weber condemns bureaucracy precisely because he adheres only to formal rationality and hence no equity; he integrates this kind of Kadi justice into his own view with what he considers real justice—he would not consider it formal justice.

LS: But what can real justice mean here?

Student: [inaudible]

LS: No. In the values. Real justice has something to do with the values. But Weber of course praised bureaucracy very highly in its sphere, and the judges[34] in this respect[35] represent the bureaucracy. The interesting thing is legislation as distinguished from judgment, and here in the political field, where not the judge decides but the legislator,[36] of course the political questions arise. But what guide do the legislators have? Values. Since the realm of values, to take the best construction, is rent by discord, you cannot pick value A without rejecting value B. And this decision cannot be rationally justified.

[xiii] "Kadi justice" refers to "informal judgments rendered in terms of concrete ethical or other practical valuations." See Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, chapter 11.

Student: It cannot formally be rational.

LS: Formally? That is still less exciting. There is no justification. That is his great assertion. Weber will remain always a legal positivist, that one must take for granted. That there is in Weber more than in Talcott Parsons[xiv] . . . Surely Weber was a highly civilized man of broad historical knowledge, and not vicious. But the question is not that of Weber's private virtues, which are very high, but of the public vice of his theory. Whether his theory is also so much more intelligent and thoughtful than [that] of run-of-the-mill positivists does not . . . I believe I have shown that to be the case, and I refer you to that.[xv] We should take this up again. Let us continue. Drop the next passage, and there he goes on to say "And I think I believe I have shown with sufficient clarity the foundation." [Page 207.]

Reader:

> I think I have now shown sufficiently clearly the basis of a democracy: I have especially desired to do so, for I believe it to be of all forms of government the most natural—

LS: Let me translate: because it seemed, it *seemed*, the most natural.[37]

Reader:

> because it seemed the most natural, and the most consonant with individual liberty.

LS: Yes, most consonant with the liberty which nature grants to everyone.

Reader:

> In it no one transfers his natural right so absolutely that he has no further voice in affairs, he only hands it over to the majority of a society, whereof he is a unit. Thus all men remain, as they were in the state of nature, equals.

LS: And that is almost literally what Rousseau said later on. Rousseau says the problem of free society consists in establishing a social order in which man remains as free as he was heretofore. Spinoza says in which man remains as equal as he was heretofore. Democracy is the most natural regime because it preserves natural equality.

Did Spinoza prove that men are by nature equal? There is an argument in the fifth chapter which not all of you may remember, but it is one of the most important passages politically speaking in the book.[38] The key point is this: men regard themselves as equal. They regard themselves as equal and therefore they do not tolerate the rule of another man, of a human being, and therefore they want to have divine rulership. But[39] [that] men foolishly regard themselves as equals of course doesn't make them equal. That is one great difficulty. Well, we can say: All right, but did he not show at the beginning of this very chapter that all men are equal because all men are

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[xiv] Talcott Parsons (1902-1979), American sociologist known for "a general theory of action," which he developed in *Structure of Social Action* (1937), *Social System* (1951), and *Towards a General Theory of Action* (1951).

[xv] Strauss is perhaps referring to his discussion of Weber in chapter 2 of *Natural Right and History*.

equally determined by nature to act the way in which they do, the wise as well as the fool? This is not[40] equality, no, because this equality applies not only to wise men and fools but in principle to thunderstorms and what have you. It is the equality of all beings, which is absolutely useless for any political consideration. Spinoza admits, in a way, equality, but he has not yet found the real basis of that. And as Mr. ____ noted when he read it, this whole sentence is qualified by a *videbatur*.[xvi] That is not an apodictic statement. Spinoza appears to applaud civil opinion, a belief in equality which is of course by no means satisfactory.

That is the question which we have to consider in the sequel. In what sense can Spinoza say that men are equal, he who talks all the time of the gulf separating the wise from the fool? Do you see any way out of this difficulty? There is something I believe in the seventeenth chapter in which this question comes up. What could it be? Mr. ____?

Student: All men equally desire security in order to achieve their ends?

LS: That would be[41] Hobbes. Very good, what you say. That is Hobbes's point. This rational good is a rule of inequality—Plato, Aristotle, and all the rest. Forget about that. Then[42] [Hobbes] can have equality, because in this respect—regarding self-preservation narrowly and strictly understood—all men are equal. There are some exceptions which we can dismiss, suicides and so on, but generally speaking all men desire equally to preserve themselves, and if this is the fundamental fact, men are equal in the decisive respect. That one can do. That is one point. Then Spinoza,[43] in a purely political discussion, accepts a Hobbean principle which does not fit very well into the whole. But there is also another consideration which is reconcilable with what Mr. ____ suggests, and that is this. The old doctrine, classically represented by Aristotle: men are by nature unequal. That means that the inferior men are ordered towards the superior men, towards obeying them. In the simple discussion of the first book about slavery,[xvii] this poor moron the natural slave tends toward the master who guides him. I mean, he doesn't know it in his mind but his whole being bespeaks that it is so. They are mutually ordered toward each other. [But in Spinoza's anti-teleological doctrine], there is no orderedness of one thing to another. There is no orderedness altogether[44], and from this point of view you can say they are equal. But still, how can you reconcile that with the fact that the same equality applies also to lions, tigers, skunks, and other things? That is the difficulty. All right, you want to introduce common sense, and that is always very good, to introduce common sense, provided your philosophy permits you to appeal to common sense. Whether a philosophy geometrically demonstrated can appeal to common sense is another matter. That is the difficulty.

And there is something else: according to Spinoza all universals are mere figments of the human mind. Can we speak of an essence of man? If you will look at these passages in the second book of the *Ethics* you will be surprised how he proceeds. Suddenly you find an axiom at the beginning of the second part of the *Ethics*. *Homo cogitat*: Man thinks. But *quid est homo*: What is man? No legitimate answer is possible on the basis of Spinoza's epistemology, as little as in modern science. The true answer to the question of what is man would be a kind of formula giving the efficient causes of man and whether there is such a clear distinction possible, as in the classical notion. You know the difficulty we have today: How can you draw the line? You know

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[xvi] "It seemed."

[xvii] The first book of Aristotle's *Politics*.

these people would say that monkeys also have intelligence, and you remember these examples of the moral qualities, so the only thing that remains is the tiny thing called verbal symbols, which the brutes do have and man has.

Well, of course the question arises [about] the use of verbal symbols—such a little thing; and does it not conceal an absolute gulf between the lowest man and the highest chimpanzee? The denial of the crucial difference of the species, antedating by centuries theories of evolution—you know, long before anyone thought of evolution, philosophers questioned the crucial significance of species, of the universals. Now is this then possible? We cannot go into these questions with Spinoza's philosophy, but even here in its more limited political version we find a reflection of that. Even in Hobbes, the same difficulty exists. Why? Because if man has the right to act with a view only to his self-preservation, the same applies to brutes as well. Why can Hobbes disregard it? For the very practical reason that there is no problem: men can handle all brutes with the exception of some tiny microbes and so on, but the really smartest guys[45], fellows like lions and tigers, that is not a problem. There never was a problem. That is a very good practical reason, but theoretically the problem remains here.[46]

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[1] Deleted "you know"
[2] Deleted "in Latin (a relative). But"
[3] Deleted "We have discussed this last time."
[4] Deleted "Chapter 5"
[5] Deleted "it would be"
[6] Deleted "this"
[7] Deleted "But"
[8] Deleted "also"
[9] Moved "here"
[10] Deleted "So but still"
[11] Deleted "be"
[12] Deleted "but"
[13] Deleted "very notion – the"
[14] Deleted "did"
[15] Deleted "but"
[16] Deleted "because"
[17] Moved "Now the next point."
[18] Deleted "this argument"
[19] Deleted "and"
[20] Deleted "the"
[21] Deleted "the question is"
[22] Deleted "Because in his"
[23] Deleted "which"
[24] Deleted "and therefore"
[25] Deleted "now you know"
[26] Deleted "I mean"
[27] Deleted "but that is"
[28] Deleted "as"
[29] Deleted "But"
[30] Deleted "I would say"
[31] Deleted "and"
[32] Deleted "but there"
[33] Deleted "I don't think that… I mean"
[34] Deleted "are"
[35] Deleted "they"
[36] Deleted "there"

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37 Deleted “Yes”
38 Deleted “were you the one who read the paper on Chapter Mr. __? Do you remember that?”
39 Deleted “since”
40 Deleted “the”
41 Deleted “the”
42 Deleted “he”
43 Deleted “who here”
44 Moved “in Spinoza’s anti-teleological doctrine:
45 Deleted “like”
46 Deleted “I have to interrupt it at this point but it is 5:30. Next time the rest of Chapter 16 and then Chapter 17.”

Session 11: no date

Leo Strauss: We come[1] back to chapter 16, the end [of which] we have not discussed. There are a few points which we should take up. One is from chapter 19, page 247, the third paragraph.

Reader:

> Thus, in order that the religion revealed by the prophets might have the force of law among the Jews, it was necessary that every man of them should yield up his natural right, and that all should, with one accord, agree that they would only obey such commands as God should reveal to them through the prophets. Just as we have shown to take place in a democracy, where men with one consent agree to live according to the dictates of reason.

LS: That's too weak: "To live on the basis of the dictate of reason alone." [2]You recall that problem we discussed before: democracy is the rule of reason alone. Now that cannot be literally true, for the reasons which we discussed. Do you remember some of the reasons why democracy cannot be simply rule of reason on Spinoza's principles? One at a time please.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: Yes, and also more visibly. Spinoza [of course] doesn't[3] speak of our modern democracies, but let us take a more simple democratic society: the citizen body assembled, [which] makes the laws. Now why is this not simply rational, so [his earlier statement] cannot be literally true? What can he mean by that, that democracy is the rule of reason alone? That is the point we discussed last time and we have to take it up again.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: Yes, but that would be true of a purely secular monarchy and aristocracy as well. Now what would be the precise reason? If the rationale of the society is not the full human good, *summum bonum*, the highest good, but what I called last time the subrational good—a good which all men can see and appreciate, security plus comfort, or to use Locke's expression, comfortable self-preservation[i]—then a democracy as democracy can in principle be dedicated to this goal, whereas in any non-democratic regime there is a possibility that the rulers, either the few or the king, might think of their comfortable self-preservation alone without serious regard for the comfortable self-preservation of all. To that extent, democracy's end is more rational than the end of monarchy and aristocracy. To that extent only. But this does not do away with the difficulty that it is not enough to have this relatively rational end; it is also a question of proper judgment, of the means conducive to that end, i.e., of laws and policies. And whether that is sufficiently well provided for in democracies, we do not yet know. I only wanted to remind you of this problem which goes through the whole *Theologico-Political Treatise*: democracy is *the* sound regime, the regime in which power and reason coincide.[4]

So to turn back to chapter 16, there were a few passages which we still have to discuss. We will turn to page 208. You remember the chief content of chapter 16, the statement about natural

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[i] *First Treatise*, sec. 87.

right: right is equal to might, and there is no preferred right of the wise. The natural right of the wise to act wisely is not higher than the natural right of the fools to act foolishly.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: Sure, but how does he solve this difficulty?

Student: He brings in the rule of reason as a guide or the norm whereby society ultimately must rest.

LS: Yes, how can he do that? What permits him to do that?

Student: Well, I am not sure what permits him, but it seems to me this rule of reason is in conflict with the universality of the right and power of nature.

LS: Yes, there is a link.[5] In the sixteenth chapter, about two pages from the beginning, he said, "nature is not limited by the laws of human reason which considers, which intends, only men's true good and man's conservation." Now man is a part of the whole, surely, and as such he is not superior to any other part according to Spinoza. But he is a part distinct from other parts. The nature of man is not the nature of a lion or of a cat, to take some examples to which he himself referred. And while there cannot be a good of the whole, there can be a good of the specific parts of the whole; and therefore it is possible to have an ethical and political teaching within the context of Spinoza's metaphysics. If the whole were entirely homogenous, as in Parmenides's globe—do you remember that, where every part of the whole is homogenous?—then there could not be an ethics. Clearly not. But if the whole is heterogeneous and[6] man can have a distinct nature distinguishing him from other parts of the whole, then there is in principle the possibility of ethics.

Now the great difficulty with Spinoza, I admit[7], is that when one[8] go[es] through his *Ethics*, he is really trying to conceive of the whole somehow in terms of homogeneity. If I may mention this to those who have never looked at the *Ethics*: the whole or, as Spinoza says, God, has two knowable attributes. One he calls extension, which means in Spinoza a bit more than mere space; we could even say moved matter. Now moved matter is of course homogeneous. And then there is another attribute which he calls *cogitatio*, thought. And these [two] are heterogeneous; I mean, there is no possibility of bridging the gulf between cogitation and extension; they are strictly parallel and never interfere with each other. But this heterogeneity he does admit. But he must conceive, by virtue of his whole doctrine, of cogitation as something in itself as homogeneous, [just] as space is homogeneous. That is the great paradox of Spinoza's metaphysics. And therefore your question is not wholly unfounded; and stated differently, Spinoza does not have a clear basis for speaking of the essence of man as essentially different from the essence of other beings. His whole criticism of universals implies that. I mean there is a great difficulty in Spinoza there, I will grant you that; but in this book where he speaks commonsensically rather than systematically he leaves it at this commonsense truth that man is obviously different from the brutes, and therefore the good for a human being is obviously different from the good for a donkey—as you can easily find out from everyday experience: if you try to feed steaks to a donkey and hay to a human being, to take a simple example, you will see that there is really a

difference; and the same would apply to other higher spheres than mere food (if there is such a higher sphere available in the case of the donkey at all), which would[9] also show the difference. But disregarding these difficult questions, so-called metaphysical questions, it is possible to say there is a whole, man is a part of the whole and must be understood as part of the whole; but being a part of the whole, he is not simply reducible to the whole, to that which is homogeneous and goes through every being.

Student: You mentioned that if all the parts were homogenous, there could be no foundation for ethics.

LS: Surely there would be no[thing] distinctively human. That would only be folklore, that we make a distinction between men and other beings.

Student: This distinction which is so necessary means there are two realms of law, the law which guides the part and the law which guides the whole; and the law which is of the part has as its basis final causes.

LS: In a way, yes.[10] That is at least the simplest solution. But Spinoza must try to avoid that, and therefore he argues roughly as follows. Say man has somehow a different nature from other beings, [and] this nature consists in a desire. He says somewhere in the *Ethics* the essence of a being is its desire, its specific desire.[ii] All beings desire their self-preservation, but man's desire for self-preservation is a desire for his self-preservation as a human being, whereas the self-preservation of a donkey is a desire of the self-preservation of a donkey. You can also make an experiment and say, for example, if you were confronted[11] with the proposition "You should be transformed into a donkey," [12] would you still regard it as self-preservation? Although you would still exist—you are not dead, [but] you would be a donkey. But it is not self-preservation, because what you mean is self-preservation as a human being. That is a crucial but tacit implication of Spinoza's observation.[iii]

Now if that is so, if man's essence is a desire for preserving himself as a human being, then this desire acts of course as an end as far as man acts consciously, not merely instinctively. But the end is only something posited by the desire, it is not something outside the desire which elicits the desire. That is the Aristotelian solution, that the end is somehow outside the desire eliciting the desire. That, by the way, was the objection of Nietzsche to Spinoza, that Spinoza was still teleological because he spoke of self-preservation. A strictly non-teleological doctrine would conceive of man as only in terms of urges. Urges, how shall I explain that? A kind of explosion. That is[13] [not] set forth as a positive objection, but something like an explosion comes out of a being and no possible conservation of ends, even in a derivative sense, is possible. I am sorry I cannot express it more clearly.[iv]

What Nietzsche meant by the will to power was exactly this, that[14] there is only a fundamental urge which has no end, the goal of which cannot be expressed in terms of ends. It is only a profound urge, not knowing in any way its natural goal. In Spinoza's case, man can[15][not] know

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[ii] See *Ethics* III, Definition of the Affects.
[iii] On this theme, see *Ethics* IIIP39S.
[iv] As Strauss notes, "explosion" is probably not the most suitable word. "Expression" may be a better fit.

his natural goal, but can know his natural desire and the end inherent in that desire. To that extent, there is a natural end in Spinoza.

Student: Is the end inherent in the desire the end of contemplation, or the end of mere self-preservation?

LS: I think what Spinoza means is this: the primary [thing] is self-preservation, but contemplation is self-preservation understood. That is what Spinoza is driving at. That is a very complicated thing which Spinoza develops in the third book of his *Ethics*, but that he is driving at.[v] One can say Spinoza argues roughly as follows. Self-preservation means preservation of my self; therefore the integrity of the self, the freedom of the self, is the true meaning of self-preservation. But I am truly myself only to the extent to which I am not acted upon but act; and this acting, this freedom from being acted upon in its fullest form is understanding. Therefore self-preservation in these terms, if this is true, is contemplation.

Student: And that the end of desire is no longer desire. That is, desire culminates in something which is no longer desire.

LS: To which he would answer: you do not contemplate all the time. You relapse necessarily into all kinds of the stages of drowsiness, and therefore[16] desire is coeval with man. Because the state of contemplation, of full understanding, will only be relatively free states.

Student: I can't help thinking that this understanding of man's role in the whole of nature really separates man. It affects a separation of part and whole.

LS: Yes, but you can say that was the reason why Kant, for example, rejected Spinoza,[17] the idea being [that] in such a pantheistic context, ethics are not possible. Is that what you have in mind?

Student: No, I have in mind that it really isn't a pantheistic context. The context is what the result belies.

LS: The fact that Spinoza wrote an *Ethics* contradicts his pantheistic metaphysics. Is that what you mean?

Student: The fact that the *Ethics* is based on a law of human reason which cannot be derived, or cannot be seen to be as part of the law of nature as a whole.

LS: I think it turns really around this question: Can there be essential differences within the whole? Can the whole consist of heterogeneous parts or not? Since Spinoza denies the true heterogeneity he gets into trouble, that I would grant. But in this respect Spinoza shares of course the difficulties of all positivism today,[18] which also denies the essential difference between men and brutes, and that is at the root of the whole problem in the social sciences. If there is a nature of man distinguishing man from all brutes, you have already a foundation for an ethical teaching,

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[v] While the third book of the *Ethics* does introduce Spinoza's notion of self-preservation, contemplation (or *amor dei intellectualis*) as the ultimate expression of self-preservation is explored primarily in the fifth book.

because the good of man is then the specifically human good. And this was the old view, the Platonic and Aristotelian view, and from this Spinoza is surely separated.

Student: Is there a difference between the human reason that he referred to in the passage we read before and thought as an attribute of God?

LS: Sure. We have read the passage in the first chapter where Spinoza says one cannot ascribe to God mind properly speaking. That shows it. Thought, I mean *cogitatio* [in] Latin, cogitation, is a kind of thought stuff, mind stuff, but not yet mind. Spinoza conceives of cogitation [as] really parallel to matter. You know the obvious thing is this: you can speak of the one matter (that makes some sense, at least it seems so), the one moved matter; but in the case of thought, we always have individuals. I mean[19] circumscript—monadic, as they say. There is no proper provision made for that by Spinoza. That was Leibniz's criticism: Leibniz said about Spinoza very simply that Spinoza would be right if there were no monads, i.e., if there were no individuals with individual consciousnesses.

But really we cannot go into these grave problems of Spinoza's metaphysics. There are infinite difficulties. And to mention only one point: you see, Spinoza tried to go as far as possible in the direction of materialism, to state it very simply, materialism in the sense of modern science, moved matter, not the atomic view proper. But he saw one thing. In one thing he differed from materialism. Consciousness of consciousness, that is what[20] *cogitatio* means, cannot be body. Hobbes, who was a much more healthy individual than Spinoza (who died from TB when he was forty-four) and was also a rather crude fellow, said: There is only body. But what about a thought, a fancy, a desire, which is not body? He said that is nothing but seemings and apparitions only. This doesn't work. Spinoza saw that, and therefore he said it is impossible to conceive of everything that is as bodily. It is impossible. But we must conceive of the non-body in as bodily terms as possible, i.e., one must conceive of cogitation or consciousness as strictly parallel to extension, to body. That is a fantastic suggestion of Spinoza's metaphysics.[21] It leads to the so-called psycho-physic parallelism. Did you ever hear of that? It is Spinoza's creation, and that is powerful up to the present day. Now psycho-physic parallelism means there is no influence of the body on the mind or vice versa, which is of course absolutely shocking to common sense. If you do this or tug away,[vi] you will see the influence of the body on the mind and vice versa. Now Spinoza goes so far as to say in a passage of the *Ethics* [that] in the case of a building being erected, the visible process of the building going up and the process going on in the mind of the architect have no causal relation—have no causal relation; they are strictly parallel processes, which is simply absurd. The question is only: How could this have [had] such an attraction on a mind like that of Spinoza? And that had something to do with a desire to have a perfectly self-contained system of physical causation into which nothing non-physical, soul-like, would enter. That was the fear of these people. You see, the soul, something non-bodily, should [not] be able to interfere with the strictly mechanical, i.e., bodily process. That is behind that. I am sorry we cannot enter any discussion of these things,[22] [but] I would[23] be liable to criminal prosecution because we are in a political science department, and I have to comply with the terms of my contract.

[vi] Strauss evidently gestures in ways that are readily imagined.

Now to come back to the main point, there is surely a very great difficulty of an ethics altogether on the basis of Spinoza's metaphysics. In this respect, Mr. ___ is right, but since we are dealing here only with this rather popular writing of Spinoza, here the difficulty does not appear.

Student: . . . distinguishes between [the] rational and subrational and irrational aim. What really is the difference between that and what Aristotle says? A man who pursues these irrational and subrational ends will suffer for it, being the kind of being he is.

LS: That is what he means, yes. You can also state it as follows. [A] state of basic gladness doesn't just mean [no] interruptions by pain, of course, but gladness and poise[24] [are] not possible except for the man of contemplation. Now since we all seek pleasure and try to avoid pain, take it as simply as that, and we are proceeding by trial and error and see, for example, that if we eat or drink too much, that is unpractical. Now if we radicalize that and take into consideration also other things, we come to the conclusion that only a contemplative life can be a life of poise, and fundamental satisfaction and fundamental gladness. This is the old story of Plato and Aristotle, which Spinoza only repeats. The remarkable thing is that Spinoza tries to base this old notion, that man's highest good consists in contemplation, on this new foundation, on the foundation of the new Galilean-Cartesian science. That is the peculiar difficulty of Spinoza. Now let us turn to page 208, paragraph 2.

Reader:

> Wrong is conceived only in an organized community: nor can it ever accrue to subjects from any act of the sovereign, who has the right to do what he likes. It can only arise, therefore, between private persons, who are bound by law and right not to injure one another. Justice consists in the habitual rendering to every man his lawful due: injustice consists in depriving a man, under the pretence of legality, of what the laws, rightly interpreted, would allow him. These last are also called equity and iniquity, because those who administer the laws are bound to show no respect of persons, but to account all men equal, and to defend every man's right equally, neither envying the rich nor despising the poor.

LS: Yes, let us stop here. You see, I thought we should read this because it shows clearly Spinoza's complete rejection of natural law in the traditional sense. Right and wrong means only civil right and civil wrong. Even equity has application only to civil right and wrong. Hobbes, with whom Spinoza is in considerable agreement, had not gone so far. He had said right and wrong only depend on civil right, but equity and inequity are determined by natural law, so that Hobbes is more favorable to the traditional natural law doctrine than Spinoza. Spinoza comes much closer to Machiavelli at this point: there is no natural law. Even that law, the divine law or natural law of which he had spoken in chapter 4, is not a natural law strictly speaking because there is no natural end of man in Spinoza. Read now on the same page the third paragraph.

Reader:

> The men of two states become allies, when for the sake of avoiding war, or for some other advantage, they covenant to do each other no hurt, but on the contrary, to assist each other if necessity arises, each retaining his independence. Such a covenant is valid so long as its basis of danger or advantage is in force: no one

> enters into an engagement, or is bound to stand by his compacts unless there be a hope of some accruing good, or the fear of some evil: if this basis be removed the compact thereby becomes void. (*TPT*, chap. 16)

LS: Let us stop here. In one word: there is no international law. In Hobbes's view, which Spinoza tacitly accepts, international law is in itself identical with the natural law of individuals. Why? Because states are in a state of nature toward one another. They do not have a superior who gives them laws and can enforce the laws, so that a nation of states is fundamentally the same as a relation of individuals in a state of nature. But Hobbes admitted a natural law, for example, to seek peace, and not to be bestial and cruel and this kind of thing. And from Hobbes's point of view, while this doesn't have legal force properly speaking, it is a demand of reason to which states are subject although they cannot have legal power. Spinoza drops even this: there is no natural law, no natural international law. As for a positive international law, that can be derivative only from contracts between the sovereign states, from promises. But every promise given by a sovereign state is subject to the condition "as long as things are in the way in which they were when the contract was made." And who is going to judge of whether affairs stand as they stood? The sovereign state, each sovereign state. There is no international law. International law is a kind of provisional agreement which you cannot really trust, and there is no possibility of [an] international court or things of this kind. So in all these respects, Spinoza's doctrine is unqualifiedly Machiavellian. At the end of the same paragraph.

Reader:

> Moreover, if we consult loyalty and religion, we shall see that no one in possession of power ought to abide by his promises to the injury of his dominion; for he cannot keep such promises without breaking the engagement he made with his subjects, by which both he and they are most solemnly bound.

LS: Yes. Now what does this mean? That is an interesting argument, a moral justification of Machiavellianism. The highest duty of the government is toward their subjects. This overrides all other considerations. Therefore if some treachery against a foreign power is in the judgment of the[25] [sovereign] conducive to the well-being of his subjects, it is his duty to[26] [consummate] that treachery. There is no question that Spinoza's teaching follows fundamentally the Machiavellian line, and to that extent the beginning of the argument "right is might" is preserved.[27]

There is one more point here I think we should discuss. No, that is too long. Let us turn to something[28] toward the end, on page 211, and that is the[29] crucial question. Hitherto he has made clear what sovereignty means, and sovereignty means [the] omnipotence of the government—omnipotent in that there is nothing to which the government is not entitled to be the sole judge. The government can be the citizen body assembled, naturally; he doesn't think here of an absolute monarchy, an absolute despotism. But this citizen body is able to do what it wants not subject to any law. It doesn't obey anyone. What about the revealed law? Is the sovereign power subject to the revealed law? That is the question.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: Yes, well let us see how he argues that out. On page 211, paragraph 4.

Reader:

> We may be asked, what should we do if the sovereign commands anything contrary to religion, and the obedience which we have expressly vowed to God? Should we obey the Divine law or the human law? I shall treat of this question at length hereafter, and will therefore merely say now, that God should be obeyed before all else, when we have a certain and indisputable revelation of His will.

LS: That is exactly how Hobbes starts the argument. The question is put in these terms: Whom do we have to obey in case of conflict, God or man? Of course God, there is no question. But we must be sure that God is speaking and what he gets [is what] he wants. Now go on.

Reader:

> but men are very prone to error on religious subjects, and, according to the diversity of their dispositions, are wont with considerable stir to put forward their own inventions, as experience more than sufficiently attests, so that if no one were bound to obey the state in matters which, in his own opinion concern religion, the rights of the state would be dependent on every man's judgment and passions.

LS: You see, it is exactly the same argument as against the civil or secular claims of the government. Everyone as judge is incompatible with social life; therefore the judgment must be given to one man or body of men, the sovereign. And the same applies for the same reason to religion. Yes? [Page 212.]

Reader:

> No one would consider himself bound to obey laws framed against his faith or superstition; and on this pretext he might assume unbounded license. In this way, the rights of the civil authorities would be utterly set at naught, so that we must conclude that the sovereign power, which alone is bound both by Divine and natural right to preserve and guard the laws of the state, should have supreme authority for making any laws about religion which it thinks fit; all are bound to obey its behests on the subject in accordance with their promise which God bids them to keep.
>
> However, if the sovereign power be heathen, we should either enter into no engagements therewith, and yield up our lives sooner than transfer to it any of our rights; or, if the engagement be made, and our rights transferred, we should (inasmuch as we should have ourselves transferred the right of defending ourselves and our religion) be bound to obey them, and to keep our word: we might even rightly be bound so to do, except in those cases where God, by indisputable revelation, has promised His special aid against tyranny, or given us special exemption from obedience.

LS: Hobbes, in his discussion of the same problem[30]—an Anglican bishop attacked Hobbes for setting forth the same doctrine—[said] that one must obey the government in everything, even in religious matters. And therefore the great question is: If the government is pagan, what should be

done? Absolute obedience. But the bishop was rightly shocked,[vii] and then Hobbes made an exception in favor of the bishop and says this applies only to Christian laymen, not to bishops. And then the bishop goes to martyrdom. Spinoza, as you see, makes a similar point. You know the argument of the book was based on the principle that the Bible is a revealed document. And here the contradiction becomes perfectly clear: if the civil sovereign—the sovereign—is the only authority ultimately regarding religion too, the government can abolish the Christian religion. And also, Christianity, or whatever the religion is, owes its authority exclusively to its having been adopted by the civil sovereign. I mean, in all these matters Spinoza merely repeats what Hobbes says. Let us read the beginning of chapter 17, only the very beginning.

Reader:

> The theory put forward in the last chapter, of the universal rights of the sovereign power—

LS: "Universal" is all right, but it is better translated literally: "about the right of the sovereign to everything." Universal means, of course, "everything," but it is clearer this way. To everything—that is literally to everything. Now the question of course is: How can you have freedom on the basis of such unqualified sovereignty? And what would be the general answer in Spinoza? You must know that.

Student: The natural right.

LS: No, no. How would Spinoza answer this question? If you want to have peace, security, the opposite of anarchy, the government must be sovereign. Everything must be subject to the power of the government legally, and nothing can be exempt from it. How can you have freedom on this basis?

Student: Democracy.

LS: Spell it out! Why does democracy as such—

Student: Because then everyone would be sovereign.

LS: Or part of the sovereign. That is fundamentally what men like Spinoza and Rousseau had in mind and what is somehow underlying the modern doctrine of democracy. Did you want to say something?

Student: He first gives the argument that . . . retain the right of revolution.

LS: So now we turn to Spinoza. Spinoza says, first, absolute surrender of all rights to the sovereign. First step. What is the ray of hope after that has been settled?[31] The government consists of human beings with limited physical power and so on. They cannot be omnipotent

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[vii] Strauss is probably referring to Archbishop John Bramhall (1594-1663), who conversed with Hobbes on some topics, including free will and spontaneity, and wrote an attack called *The Catching of Leviathan, the Great Whale* (1658).

strictly speaking; therefore some freedom willy-nilly remains for the subjects, and that is surely the beginning of Spinoza's argument. Read now the first sentence of chapter 17.

Reader:

> The theory put forward in the last chapter, of the right of the sovereign power to everything, and of the natural rights of the individual transferred thereto, though it corresponds in many respects with actual practice, and though practice may be so arranged as to conform to it more and more, must nevertheless always remain in many respects purely ideal.

LS: Purely theoretical, as he says. Yes, and that is the hope. But in the sequel, if you turn to the bottom of page 214.

Reader:

> If it were really the case that men could be deprived of their natural rights so utterly as never to have any further influence on affairs, except with the permission of the holders of the sovereign right, it would then be possible to maintain with impunity the most violent tyranny, which, I suppose, no one would for an instant admit.
>
> We must, therefore, grant that every man retains some part of his right, in dependence on his own decision, and no one else's.

LS: So, all right; we have a natural guarantee of freedom because our thoughts, for example, can never be controlled by the government. He gives the example in the passage we omitted that "I should hate my benefactor." No government can achieve that because that is a natural reaction, that if someone is nice to me I feel friendly toward him. Wonderful! There is a sphere where the government cannot do anything. But[32] read the sequel.

Reader:

> However, in order correctly to understand the extent of the sovereign's right and power, we must take notice that it does not cover only those actions to which it can compel men by fear, but absolutely every action which it can induce men to perform: for it is the fact of obedience, not the motive for obedience, which makes a man a subject.
>
> Whatever be the cause which leads a man to obey the commands of the sovereign, whether to be fear or hope, or love of his country, of any other emotion—the fact remains that the man takes counsel with himself, and nevertheless acts as his sovereign orders.

LS: Now turn to page 215, paragraph 4.

Reader:

> This point is made still more clear by the fact that obedience does not consist so much in the outward act as in the mental state of the person obeying; so that he is

> most under the dominion of another who with his whole heart determines to obey another's commands; and consequently the firmest dominion belongs to the sovereign who has most influence over the minds of his subjects; if those who are most feared possessed the firmest dominion, the firmest dominion would belong to the subjects of a tyrant, for they are always greatly feared by their ruler. Furthermore, though it is impossible to govern the mind as completely as the tongue, nevertheless minds are, to a certain extent, under the control of the sovereign, for he can in many ways bring about that the greatest part of his subjects should follow his wishes in their beliefs, their loves, and their hates. Though such emotions do not arise at the express command of the sovereign they often result (as experience shows) from the authority of his power, and from his direction; in other words, in virtue of his right; we may, therefore, without doing violence to our understanding, conceive men who follow the instigation of their sovereign in their beliefs, their loves, their hates, their contempt, and all other emotions whatsoever. (*TPT*, chap. 17)

LS: So what follows about the natural limitation of the power of the government? It can be evaded. The government can control men's thoughts. So that is no help.

Student: At the beginning of this section when he said that you have to attribute actions taken in deliberation to obedience, he only speaks of emotions so if you . . . the citizens is not a subject.

LS: You mean he obeys only himself, in the phrase of Rousseau.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: You mean to say this. I see, the emotionally whipped up individual also does not obey.

Student: He's obeying.

LS: Why does he obey?

Student: [inaudible]

LS: I don't recognize the problem in your formulation. I mean, the problem which Spinoza has in mind is this. At first glance it appears that there is a sphere which by nature is not subject to the government: thoughts. Thoughts in the widest sense include emotions, as you call them. Actions can be controlled, but what is going on in the mind cannot be seen and therefore seems not to be subject to control. But then Spinoza says unfortunately things are much more complicated, because the thoughts and the passions of men can be influenced by what the government does and there is theoretically no limit to that. People can be induced to hate their own parents by the government. We have had historical examples in our century of that. You only have to present the parents as traitors; then they are no longer parents, you know. And you know this. Therefore the question is this: Where do we get some limitation of this sovereign, where do we get some freedom? The natural limitation doesn't suffice. We have seen that.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: What Spinoza has in mind is this: that a truly thoughtful man could not be controlled by the government. But if you are constantly fed with misinformation[33] and you believe it, you believe what the government says, your reason acting legitimately on this basis will induce a state of mind emotional or unemotional. And the way in which Spinoza does this is—it is possible in most cases—what are the words of Lincoln? You cannot fool all of the people all of the time, but you can fool most of the people all the time.[viii] [Inaudible][ix]

Sure, but there is always a simple device for that, you know: gallows. You make it a punishable offence that if you spread this kind of rumor or if you enlist in the British navy, or whatever it may be, that's high treason.

Student: Then according to this passage he means almost all the people. Only an insignificant group will be . . .

LS: Sure. They can make some trouble, but the government is always more powerful. And that's easy, that is a simple problem—I mean, speaking of that problem in purely technical terms, that's easy; whether it is wise in the long run is another matter. We must see that. But up to now we have only this crucial admission: there is no natural limitation to the power of the government. No legal limitation, that we knew before; but there is no natural limitation because the government can—you see, you have here the whole doctrine of propaganda as it was developed in our age.

Student: I was thinking also you might have rich and poor . . . rich, though [a] minority, as a body very potent. You can't hang them; there are still too many.

LS: There are various methods: there is the possibility of outright confiscation; there is the possibility of confiscatory taxes, which is in a less painful way what outright confiscation was. We are speaking now of the principle. And we must see where in Spinoza we find a principle of limitation. Now let us turn to page 216, paragraph 3.

Reader:

> That the preservation of a state chiefly depends on the subjects' fidelity and constancy in carrying out the orders they receive, is most clearly taught both by reason and experience; how subjects ought to be guided so as best to preserve their fidelity and virtue is not so obvious. All, both rulers and ruled, are men, and prone to follow after their lusts. The fickle disposition of the multitude almost reduces those who have experience of it to despair, for it is governed solely by emotions, not by reason—

[viii] The statement is often attributed to Lincoln, made in a speech made in September 1858 in Clinton, IL. However there is evidence that Lincoln never said it. See Thomas E. Schwartz, "'You Can Fool All the People': Lincoln Never Said That," *For the People* (A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association) 5 (2003), 1.

[ix] The transcriber notes "low flying aircraft"; the inaudible portion evidently included a question or comment from a student.

LS: You see, that is very important in the book of a man who says—who almost says democracy is the rule of reason.

Reader:

> it rushes headlong into every enterprise, and is easily corrupted either by avarice or luxury; everyone thinks himself omniscient and wishes to fashion all things to his liking, judging a thing to be just or unjust, lawful or unlawful, according as he thinks it will bring him profit or loss: vanity leads him to despise his equals, and refuse their guidance: envy of superior fame or fortune (for such gifts are never equally distributed) leads him to desire and rejoice in his neighbour's downfall. I need not go through the whole list, everyone knows already how much crime results from disgust at the present—desire for change, headlong anger, and contempt for poverty—and how men's minds are engrossed and kept in turmoil thereby.
>
> To guard against all these evils, and form a dominion where no room is left for deceit; to frame our institutions so that every man, whatever his disposition, may prefer public right to private advantage, this is the task and this the toll. (*TPT*, chap. 17)

LS: Yes, let us stop here. If we take this together, we see this omnipotent government and the threat of unbearable tyranny, and the poor people oppressed. Then Spinoza says: Don't get sentimental; these people are not good. On the contrary, governmental power, compulsion, is necessary. Let us never forget that. Now how do we go from here? So that is the statement of the problem up to this point.

Student: I am puzzled because the problem of freedom really doesn't arise in connection with this, because if the government is omnipotent and if omnipotence of the government is necessary vis-à-vis all these people, fickle people, then freedom is unnecessary for them. Similarly, freedom is not necessary for the intellectual because the true rational man is perfectly free.

LS: You state the problem excellently, but you omit a point, and that is this: that if you take this absolute government and it tramps the people down, and they are not such angels that we should have particular pity with them—still, as rational observers we can make a distinction between a government, an absolute government which exercises its power intelligently, sensibly, and a government which behaves bestially. The fact that these people are so irrational does not do away with the fact that they want certain things which are sensible. We must make the distinction; that is what Spinoza is trying to do. How these people go about in getting what they want is indefensible, but certain things which they want are sensible, without which human life would be absolutely nothing. We have to figure that out.

Now we have seen on a former occasion [that] according to the subrational good life these people want to live and to live with some freedom—choice of profession or whatever it might be. That is a perfectly legitimate desire from Spinoza's point of view, and it is even good for intelligent government if the people do that. But here we must see. In other words, the

subrational good, as I call it (which is not an irrational good—it is rational, but not fully rational), comfortable self-preservation, that we should try to get by all means, and Spinoza tries to answer the question: How can we get that? A realistic doctrine must take into consideration two key points which are mentioned here. First, that there must be a government which is sovereign but is in fact only omnipotent by virtue of propaganda; and secondly, we must see that the people are as much their[34] own enemy [inaudible] and not believe that, since no one hates himself [inaudible] the people will always do what is good for it. The general will can err. Between this Scylla of the public right of the government and the irrationality (Charybdis) of the multitude we must find a sober middle way. And that is what Spinoza is trying to do, [a middle way] which recognizes both terms but which seeks some relief from these in themselves wholly depressing facts: that you need an agent of compulsion of unlimited power on the one hand, and that you have[35] [to make] do with more or less irrational beings on the other.[x]

—no philosophy is needed for that. But that is a sensible thing because the health of the individuals is of course conducive to the commonwealth as a whole. And now the question: How can we get it? How must the government be constructed to give us the maximum guarantee that this sensible, low but solid good, comfortable self-preservation, will be made possible? The two enemies are that the government might become drunk with power and not care for the good of the people, and that the people might get drunk with something else, with a popular insanity (of which he spoke) which also makes impossible the achievement of the solid good. Is this clear now, that he has two clear terms of the problem? One thing is clear from the outset: the worst thing is anarchy. We must have government, strong government, solid government, number one. Number two is the irrationality of men in general and therefore of the multitude in particular, and therefore that is ultimately the reason why you must have such a strong government. And now the question arises: How can you limit the government without depriving it of authority? That is the problem. The government must remain sovereign. There can be no possibility of legal limitations of the government proper. Agents, of course—that is easy—but of the government proper there can be no limitation; and yet there must be some form of limitation if there is to be some happiness, some public happiness, possible. That he is driving at. Now let us continue on page 217, paragraph 4.

Reader:

> For the sake of making themselves secure, kings who seized the throne in ancient times used to try to spread the idea that they were descended from the immortal gods, thinking that if their subjects and the rest of mankind did not look on them as equals, but believed them to be gods, they would willingly submit to their rule, and obey their commands. Thus Augustus persuaded the Romans that he was descended from Aeneas, who was the son of Venus—

LS: And so on. We can drop some of the examples. And then he speaks of Alexander as the greatest attempt to persuade the Macedonians. Then he quotes from Curtius, [page 218].

Reader:

> Cleon, in his speech persuading the Macedonians to obey their king, adopted a similar device: for after going through the praises of Alexander with admiration,

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[x] The tape was changed at this point.

> and recalling his merits, he proceeds, "the Persians are not only pious, but prudent in worshipping their kings as gods: for kingship is the shield of public safety," and he ends thus, "I, myself, when the king enters a banquet hall, should prostrate my body on the ground; other men should do the like, especially those who are wise" (Curtius, viii.65). However, the Macedonians were more prudent—indeed, it is only complete barbarians who can be so openly cajoled, and can suffer themselves to be turned from subjects into slaves without interests of their own.

LS: You see, that distinction between slaves and subjects indicates the problem. The slaves are people whose good, whose sound, solid, if subrational good is not considered. They are mere tools. The subjects are people whose good is considered.

Reader:

> Others, notwithstanding, have been able more easily to spread the belief that kingship is sacred, and plays the part of God on the earth, that it has been instituted by God, not by the suffrage and consent of men; and that it is preserved and guarded by Divine special providence and aid. Similar functions have been promulgated by monarchs, with the object of strengthening their dominion, but these I will pass over, and in order to arrive at my main purpose, will merely recall and discuss the teaching on the subject of Divine revelation to Moses in ancient times.

LS:[36] That is of course sheer irony. I mean, Moses was such a fellow like Alexander the Great and Augustus! Now the whole thing which he shows here is the problem of monarchy. One way of solving the problem of government is monarchy. Then you have really concentrated power, the sovereignty in the clearest and most visible form but of course not the slightest guarantee for freedom. Of course a monarch can do what he wants. And how does a monarch rule? How does he succeed in occupying the terrain which is seemingly by nature not exposed to governmental control but by thought? By thought. You know if the people believe that their ruler is a god, if they believe that, they forget everything else. That's it, and that is not what he wants. Then he goes into a discussion of the Hebrew commonwealth, which is made in fairly restrained terms still. But we have to read a few passages. Read first the beginning where he states the problem.

Reader:

> We have said in Chap. V. that after the Hebrews came up out of Egypt they were not bound by the law and right of any other nation, but were at liberty to institute any new rites at their pleasure, and to occupy whatever territory they chose. After their liberation from the intolerable bondage of the Egyptians, they were bound by no covenant to any man; and, therefore, every man entered into his natural right, and was free to retain it or to give it up, and transfer it to another. Being, then, in the state of nature, they followed the advice of Moses, in whom they chiefly trusted, and decided to transfer their right to no human being, but only to God. (*TPT*, chap. 17)

LS: Let us stop here. He starts [by saying] the Jews after the liberation from Egypt were in a state of nature, and what he says about the Jews in that state applies of course to Christians in a

state of nature. In a state of nature there is no government. Everyone has the right to judge. Everyone was equal to everyone else. Now what does this equality mean, this natural equality? We have taken that up on a former occasion. [37]Spinoza doesn't believe in the natural equality of all men absolutely; no one insists more than he does on the inequality of the wise and the vulgar. What does he mean? In the first place, he means no one is by nature subject to any other man, and the reason is [that] no one is by nature ordered toward something. The denial of teleology means here the denial of a natural hierarchy.[38] Spinoza[39] [in] the political [context] disregards, with some justice, the highest good simply and leaves it at what I call the subrational good, comfortable self-preservation. And in this respect men can rightly be regarded as equal because every man can understand that good, comfortable self-preservation, and there is no reason why one man should have a higher right to comfortable self-preservation than anybody else. Everyone is capable of that in principle. If it were the full good, the highest good, contemplation, that would be preserved by nature for some, but not this social good. That makes absolute sense.

Now we cannot possibly read everything. The Jews lived in a state of nature; they transferred their sovereign power to God. That leads to the consequence that there is a complete identity of civil law and religion, of justice and religion. It is a theocracy but—page 220, paragraph 1.

Reader:

> However, this state of things existed rather in theory than in practice, for it will appear from what we are about to say, that the Hebrews, as a matter of fact, retained absolutely in their own hands the right of sovereignty: this is shown by the method and plan by the government was carried on, as I will now explain.
>
> Inasmuch as the Hebrews did not transfer their rights to any other person but, as in a democracy, all surrendered their rights equally, and cried out with one voice, "Whatsoever God shall speak (no mediator or mouthpiece being named) that will we do," it follows that all were equally bound by the covenant, and that all had an equal right to consult the Deity, to accept and to interpret His laws, so that all had an exactly equal share in the government.

LS: In other words, whether you call that theocracy or not, Spinoza says in fact it was a democracy because everyone had the equal right to hear the decision. And now[40] Spinoza describes, using biblical verses as you can see, that this was soon changed. The people became afraid, and they said Moses alone can speak to God. What does this mean in political terms? Moses is the absolute monarch. So it was a transformation of democracy into monarchy. And then he describes in very glowing terms (we cannot read all that) that Moses's monarchy was of course much more powerful than any ordinary monarchy because it was backed by the authority of the one God. That was the solution. But Moses did not appoint a successor; after Moses's death a division of powers took place. The juridical power, let us say, became divorced from the executive power. A legislative power strictly speaking didn't exist because there was a divine law which was not changeable, but interpretation of the law was left to the priests and the executive was left to Joshua and his successors. More precisely, page 222, line 7 from bottom.

Reader:

> Joshua was chosen for the chief command of the army, inasmuch as none but he had the right to consult God in emergencies, not like Moses, alone in his tent, or in the tabernacle—[41]

LS: I see. Moses alone. In other words, he could say what he wanted afterwards.

Reader:

> but through the high priest, to whom only the answers of God were revealed. Furthermore, he was empowered to execute, and cause the people to obey God's commands, transmitted through the high priests; to find, and to make use of, means for carrying them out; to choose as many army captains as he liked; to make whatever choice he thought best; to send ambassadors in his own name; and, in short, to have the entire control of the war.

LS: Turn to page 223, second half of the second paragraph.

Reader:

> The high priest, indeed, had the right of interpreting laws, and communicating the answers of God, but he could not do so when he liked, as Moses could, but only when he was asked by the general-in-chief of the army, the council—

LS: And that means of course if the general refused, said "I can do without such divine responses," the high priest was deprived of his power by this very fact. Now go on.

Reader:

> or some similar authority. The general-in-chief and the council could consult God when they liked, but could only receive His answers through the high priest; so that the utterances of God, as reported by the high priest, were not decrees, as they were when reported by Moses, but only answers; they were accepted by Joshua and the council, and only then had the force of commands and decrees.
>
> The high priest, both in the case of Aaron and his son Eleazar, was chosen by Moses; nor had anyone, after Moses' death, a right to elect to the office, which became hereditary. The general-in-chief of the army was also chosen by Moses, and assumed his functions in virtue of the commands, not of the high priest, but of Moses: indeed, after the death of Joshua, the high priest did not appoint anyone in his place, and the captains did not consult God afresh about a general-in-chief, but each retained Joshua's power in respect to the contingent of his own tribe, and all retained it collectively, in respect to the whole army. (*TPT*, chap. 17)

LS: Now let us stop here. So what happens is this, that the clear situation regarding the sovereign no longer existed after Moses. A certain element of anarchy enters. And there is another point which Spinoza develops in the sequel: the single state which existed under Moses was gradually transformed into a confederacy. The tribes became more or less independent. Only regarding religion was there a single commonwealth. All twelve tribes were united by a religion; politically

they were rather independent. Spinoza goes into these historical details [but] not for antiquarian reasons. Where do you find a parallel to this situation, politically independent states yet forming one commonwealth religiously, and therefore the sovereignty of the single states being impaired[42] [because they are parts] of a single religious commonwealth? *Respublica Christiana*, the Christian commonwealth, in which there were a variety of sovereign states but they formed parts of one religious commonwealth, the *Respublica Christiana*, and this in fact impaired the sovereignty of each of the members. In other words, Spinoza describes the defects, as he sees it, of the Christian commonwealth of the Middle Ages and of early modern times indirectly by this description of the Old Testament commonwealth after Moses, and after Joshua in particular.

Student: Is it possible to say on the basis of the discussion of the monarchy here that Spinoza seems to say that the monarchy can achieve what we can call the subrational highest good? Is this a possible interpretation, that the monarchy as shown in Moses . . . actually achieved the subrational highest good?

LS: That is not excluded of course by what he said before. On the other hand, the question of whether it is proved by what he says, that he thought . . . monarchy was possibly a desirable regime. But we will take up this whole discussion when we come to the *Political Treatise*, where the complication [introduced] by the biblical theme is absent. But if we take the position as presented here with its definitely republican, not to say democratic bias, one would have to say that Spinoza regarded it . . . more likely to have the achievement of the subrational good in a republican regime rather than a monarchic [one]. We come to some passages later.

Let us go on. Now to repeat, after Moses there was a kind of anarchy, and that was due to the fact that Moses didn't appoint a successor; and why Moses did not do that is a moot question. It appears later that one reason was that Moses acted in a spirit of favoritism: he wanted to give a preferred status to his own tribe, the Levites, and this created the difficulty. But now let us see. Spinoza, after having given this general introduction, tries to describe the virtues of this regime. He does this under two headings. First,[43] [what] protection it would give[44] against tyranny, and second,[45] [what] protection it would give against anarchy. Now first, the protection against tyranny; and here he points out—we can perhaps read that, page 226, the last paragraph.

Reader:

> Those who administer or possess governing power, always try to surround their high-handed actions with a cloak of legality, and to persuade the people that they act from good motives; this they are easily able to effect when they are the sole interpreters of the law; for it is evident that they are thus able to assume a far greater freedom to carry out their wishes and desires than if the interpretation of the law is vested in someone else, or if the laws were so self-evident that no one could be in doubt as to their meaning. We thus see that the power of evil-doing was greatly curtailed for the Hebrew captains by the fact that the whole interpretation of the law was vested in the Levites, who, on their part, had no share in the government, and depended for all their support and consideration on a correct interpretation of the laws entrusted to them. Moreover, the whole people was commanded to come together at a certain place every seven years and be

> instructed in the law by the high-priest; further, each individual was bidden to read the book of the law through and through continually with scrupulous care.

LS: Yes. You see, in other words, if you have a publicly known code and if you have an independent judiciary, that is a very great good, that is a great recommendation. But there is a certain difficulty here too. I mean, the independent judiciary makes sense, obvious sense.[46] What about the publicly known code? That binds the government—how to change laws in case of need, if there is a code laid down which cannot be changed? The second point which Spinoza makes is [that] in the Hebrew commonwealth the whole citizen body was armed, and that is a great defense against tyranny, a great theme of Machiavelli before him. The next point he makes is [that] the institution of prophecy was also conducive against tyranny, but later on Spinoza will make clear that he thinks it was not a very good institution at all. That is the central theme. The third point, there was no aristocracy of birth but only of age and virtue; and I think Spinoza thought this was good. And finally, there was a premium on peace because of the popular character of government. Now this argument has of course played a great role throughout the ages. You know, democracies are peaceful, monarchies are warlike. Thomas Paine—it is a great theme of his; [also] of Kant. But there is also the criticism of this view at the beginning of the *Federalist Papers*, where Hamilton draws up a long list of warlike democracies, which shows the situation is complicated. But it seems that Spinoza himself agreed with this view later on expressed by Paine and Kant in particular, that democracies are more peaceful, the simple reasoning being that if the people who have to do the actual fighting decide on peace or war, there will be less wars than if [the] people who do not have to fight—[47]their cabinets—decide on that. This is of course not quite true, because there is a possibility of a warlike populace; if you think of certain red Indian tribes,[xi] one wouldn't say that those who do the actual fighting would vote necessarily against the fighting.

Now we turn to the protection against anarchy. That was given primarily by the fact that there was complete coincidence of patriotism and piety, and this is of course a binding force. That meant hatred of all other nations, as enemies of God binding them together, and that means what increases social solidarity by definition is a protection against monarchy. Let us turn to the bottom of page 229.

Reader:

> How great was the effect of all these causes, namely, freedom from man's dominion; devotion to their country; absolute rights over all other men; a hatred not only permitted but pious; a contempt for their fellow-men; the singularity of their customs and religious rites; the effect, I repeat, of all these causes in strengthening the hearts of the Jews to bear all things for their country, with extraordinary constancy and valour, will at once be discerned by reason and attested by experience. Never, so long as the city was standing, could they endure to remain foreign dominion; and therefore they called Jerusalem "a rebellious city" (Ezra iv. 12). Their state after its reestablishment (which was a mere shadow of the first, for the high priests had usurped the rights of the tribal captains) was, with great difficulty, destroyed by the Romans, as Tacitus bears witness (Hist. ii 4):

[xi] It is perhaps worth pointing out that this was said in 1959.

LS: As Tacitus himself, meaning, even a Roman bears witness.

Reader:

> "Vespasian had closed the war against the Jews, abandoning the siege of Jerusalem as an enterprise difficult and arduous, rather from the character of the people and the obstinacy of their superstition, than from the strength left to the besieged for meeting their necessities."

LS: Yes. You see Spinoza indicates his criticism through the mouth of Tacitus, who had called superstition what Spinoza called religion. That is his indication of the problem, another indication of the problem of the old Hebrew commonwealth. Read the immediate sequel please.

Reader:

> But besides these characteristics, which are merely ascribed by an individual opinion, there was one feature peculiar to this state and of great importance in retaining the affections of the citizens, and checking all thoughts of desertion, or abandonment of the country: namely, self-interest, the strength and life of all human action. This was peculiarly engaged in the Hebrew state, for nowhere else did citizens possess their goods so securely as did the subjects of this community, for the latter possessed as large a share in the land and the fields as did their chiefs, and were owners of their plots of ground in perpetuity; for if any man was compelled by poverty to sell his farm or his pasture, he received it back again intact at the year of jubilee: there were other similar enactments against the possibility of alienating real property.

LS: Well, whether Spinoza really believes that this kind of absolute property rights, which could not possibly be lost even by bankruptcy—I doubt whether he regarded this as an advantage, but surely it was. In other words, the social policy of the old Hebrew state. Now especially one more point, page 231, line 3 from bottom.

Reader:

> The laws, scrupulously preserved in the inmost sanctuary, were objects of equal reverence to the people. Popular reports and misconceptions were, therefore, very little to be feared in this quarter, for no one dared decide on sacred matters, but all felt bound to obey, without consulting their reason, all the commands given by the answers of God received in the Temple, and all the laws which God had ordained. (*TPT*, chap. 17)

LS: Now stop here. What does this thing imply? There is a parenthesis which reveals everything. No one dares to form judgments about divine things. One of the greatest secrets of the solidity and the stability of the old Jewish state was the complete prohibition, implicit, against freedom of philosophy. And from this we can see that Spinoza did not think that was the solution. But what he admits is very important. It is not impossible to establish a society without any freedom of speech—without freedom of philosophy, in other words. That is possible. Therefore you cannot say there is a natural right of freedom of speech, what he says in chapter 20. That is not so

simple. You can have a society in which there is no freedom of speech to speak of and which can be very stable and have many social virtues, but from Spinoza's point of view that is not a good solution, and we must see what his reasons are. One can say a republic of this kind, as the old Hebrew state, satisfies all needs of everyone except that of philosophers; and therefore, since that is an important consideration for Spinoza, it is not a good commonwealth. Then in the sequel he raises the question: Why did such a model of perfection not last? Let us read the beginning of his criticism, [page 232].

Reader:

> I think I have now explained clearly, though briefly, the main features of the Hebrew commonwealth. I must now inquire into the causes which brought about their frequent subjection, and, finally, the complete destruction of their dominion.

LS: Which is of course also a polite way of saying it was not as perfect as I have described. If everyone was satisfied, why this constant turmoil? Go on.

Reader:

> Perhaps I shall be told that it sprang from their hardness of heart; but this is childish, for why should this people be more hard of heart than others; was it by nature?
>
> But nature forms individuals, not peoples; the latter are only distinguishable by the difference of their language, their customs, and their laws; while from the two last—i.e. customs and laws—it may arise that they have a peculiar disposition, a peculiar manner of life, and peculiar prejudices.

LS: Now let us stop here. Spinoza rejects here the view that the collapse of the Hebrew state could be due to a misuse of freedom of will. That is the more general expression for contumacy. How did it say that, *contumacia*?[xii] Hardness of heart. Spinoza seeks a natural explanation, an explanation that cannot be given in terms of a national character of a nation for the reason that nations are not natural. A nation is constituted by its laws or its customs, i.e., by conventional things, and therefore there is no national character *as* a national character. A national character is only the consequence of the conventions on which it is based, and therefore if a nation acts wrongly it must be traced not to its nature but to the customs and laws in which it was brought up. It must therefore be a defect of the legislation itself. Read the next sentence.

Reader:

> If, then, the Hebrews were harder of heart than other nations, the fault lay with their laws or customs.

LS: Spinoza here tacitly rejects an explanation of the national character in terms of the climate or the character of the territory and this kind of thing. The decline must be traced to the fault of the laws, not to nature in any way. And then he gives some biblical quotations from Jeremiah and Ezekiel to show that the Mosaic law was defective. Whatever these prophetic verses may mean, in Spinoza they mean something very political. What was the basic defect of the Jewish state, of

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[xii] Strauss may be questioning the translation in the edition of the text used by the class.

the old Hebrew state? The independent priesthood: the separation of power spiritual and power temporal. And Spinoza traces this to Moses's favoritism toward his own tribe, the Levite tribe.

I mention only one more point a bit later, where he speaks of the emergence of kingship, of human kingship in Israel, which means that it was necessary to restore temporal national unity.[48] After Moses[49] [there was] sovereignty of the tribes, and the tribes [were] united only by a religious unity, like Christian Europe. But in Israel it became necessary, when the foreign enemies became too strong, to have a human king, a temporal secular unity of the whole nation. And this[50] is of some importance, because Spinoza is one of the earlier writers on the problem of federalism, which is partly explained by the fact that he was a citizen of a federal state, the Low Countries, and he will speak of that in the *Political Treatise*. But therefore the few references to the problem of confederacies in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* are very important to see: Did he really believe that a confederacy was superior to a simply unitary state, politically speaking? The last point he makes is [about] a great defect of the old state by the institution of prophecy. Do you have this passage? [Page 236.]

Reader:

> For the prophets, prepared against every emergency, waited for a favourable opportunity, such as the beginning of a new reign, which is always precarious, while the memory of the previous reign remains green. At these times they could easily pronounce by Divine authority that the king was tyrannical, and could produce a champion of distinguished virtue to vindicate the Divine right, and lawfully to claim dominion, or a share in it. Still, not even so could the prophets effect much. They could, indeed, remove a tyrant; but there were reasons which prevented them from doing more than setting up, at great cost of civil bloodshed, another tyrant in his stead. Of discords and civil wars there was no end, for the causes for the violation of Divine right remained always the same, and could only be removed by a complete remodeling of the state.

LS: So in other words, it always comes down to the same thing: divided sovereignty, divided power, divided along the lines of spiritual-temporal. That is the arch-evil.

Student: Isn't the elevation of the Levites above the rest of the people a factor, and not just the split?

LS: Yes, that is a part of it, because what is the rationale of the elevation of the Levites? Divine service. Now the true solution from Spinoza's point of view would be the classical solution: citizen priests. In other words, the most respected older citizens are the priests. Men who are no longer able to lead armies or to be good in counsel, these were in charge of the sanctuaries. That would suit him. If you have a special priestly class, either by birth, as in the Bible, or by imposition of hand or whatever it may be in Christianity, then because of the higher dignity of the divine, the priesthood has the highest "prestige," which would always enable it to the overawe the government. Why? That is in the sequel: the multitude, the plebs, is most impressed by this power. Aristotle in his *Politics* discusses that question, but of course in no way subject to the Bible. Aristotle says, when he enumerates the functions of government—one, two, three,

four, five—he says: "Five and first" the priesthood.[xiii] Why five? Five is the order from a political point of view: it is less fundamental than the judiciary, the deliberative, and the executive. [Why] first? First in the position which it has in the opinion of the people. The city is in a way a church dedicated to the worship of the gods; you must never forget that. Perhaps you have read Fustel de Coulanges's *The Ancient City*, where this point is surely made and developed.[xiv] But Aristotle does not recognize this point of view because he does not believe in the gods of the city, but he admits it as a secondary necessity. The primary necessities are the political. And I think Spinoza fundamentally would say yes. Spinoza in his argument of course is limited by the fact that he cannot have a strict state religion. A strict state religion would be a religion limited to this particular state. That will come up in the next chapter or chapters. He must rest satisfied with a solution of the religious problem where the religion is a foreign importation, i.e., it owes its authority and dignity not to the secular government. In law it may be so, as Spinoza says, that the reason why you are obliged to be a member of this or that religion may be due to a law of the secular government, but in fact everyone knows that the authority, say, of Christianity did not stem from any civil prince and what he said. And the pagan solution did not imply a religion which had an authority of its own.

Now Spinoza, in[51] [attempting] to establish[52] a sovereign secular state, is confronted with an inherent claim of the Bible. The Bible does not owe its dignity to any measure of any civil government—on the contrary. And the only way in which he can do that is to reinterpret the Bible. And the reinterpretation amounts to this. The Bible wants only one thing: charity. But what does that mean, charity? [53][The first command of charity], as he will develop at some length,[54] is: obey the government. Hobbes also says that. Obey the government, and then the problem is solved. There may be contradictions between what the government says and what the Bible says, but this always has to cede to the primary duty of charity, which is obedience to the government. That is the simple solution, because you cannot be charitable to your fellow man if you destroy the government and bring about anarchy. You help the poor by giving him bread, milk or whatever you have, very well. But if you bring about total insecurity by disobedience to the government, you harm him infinitely more than by withholding milk and bread. And of course Spinoza knew that this was not so, but he felt that [was] the only way in which some civil order can be called upon.

Student: Isn't the desire for equality—there is a resentment against of the Hebrew state. [Is] a superior class at the root of the downfall of the state?

LS: Yes, but that is not the only thing. This exists; these kinds of things also existed elsewhere. The difficulty for him is this: on the basis of the Bible he can get what he wants only by arguing that the Bible gives everyone equally the same right to judge. But if everyone has the right to judge in matters spiritual, he must of course have the right to judge in matters temporal. The temporal democracy is an inevitable consequence of the ecclesiastical democracy, if I may say

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[xiii] Aristotle, *Politics*, book 7, 1328b2 ff.

[xiv] Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges (1830-1889) was a French historian whose classic work *La Cité antique* (1864) is praised by Strauss for its depiction of the role of religion in ancient Greece and Rome. See, for example, Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 240-41. Coulanges's book was published in English in 1877 as "The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome."

so. But then a problem arises. As a political thinker Spinoza sees that this equality of judgment is unwise because men are of different degrees of rationality, and this would not work if everyone had equally the right to judge; and he must somehow reconcile the democratic consequences imposed on him by his interpretation of the Bible—by the only interpretation which would really be destructive of an ecclesiastic hierarchy—and yet try to bring in a temporal hierarchy. Do you see? That is the difficulty, because he knows that is a great problem he has to solve.

For Hobbes it was much simpler, because Hobbes was perfectly willing to settle for absolute monarchy [of the] style [of] Henry VIII, or Nero for that matter, because Nero is absolutely harmless, [except] only for a few in his environment—you know, the courtiers. The fellows in the provinces didn't notice anything of Nero; and only a fool would want to be a courtier in the first place, so that wouldn't do any sensible man any harm. But Spinoza doesn't want that. Spinoza wants freedom, and of course the solution would be an aristocracy, the intellectual hierarchy or the hierarchy regarding education and wealth. They go together, as we shall see. If these people were in control, this would be the best solution. But how can he reconcile it with [the] democratic premise into which he was forced by a theoretical argument?

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1 Deleted "then"
2 Deleted "Now this is a statement"
3 Moved of course.
4 Deleted "and also the doubts of these simpler questions"
5 Deleted "One moment"
6 Deleted "therefore"
7 Deleted "that"
8 Deleted "would"
9 Deleted "there"
10 Deleted "But"
11 Deleted "for example"
12 Deleted "whether you would"
13 Deleted "nothing you know which is somehow"
14 Deleted "what is"
15 Deleted "know his natural goal"
16 Deleted "the"
17 Deleted "because"
18 Deleted "you know"
19 Deleted "that"
20 Deleted "it means"
21 Deleted "Now"
22 Deleted "because"
23 Deleted "also"
24 Deleted "is"
25 Deleted "government"
26 Deleted "confiscate"
27 Deleted "There is one more point here I think we should discuss. No, that is too long."
28 Deleted "easy"
29 Deleted "question, the"
30 Deleted "reduces even a Bishop"
31 Deleted "In other words"
32 Deleted "also"
33 Deleted "your reason"
34 Deleted "enemy, their"

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35 Deleted "go"
36 Deleted "Yes, but you understood this in your report last time what he means."
37 Deleted "Because"
38 Deleted "Or to come back to what Mr. __ said last time"
39 Deleted "is"
40 Deleted "then"
41 Deleted "I see"
42 Deleted "by the fact of these states forming parts"
43 Deleted "which"
44 Deleted "good"
45 Deleted "which"
46 Deleted "That about"
47 Deleted "in"
48 Deleted "Not – you know"
49 Deleted "there was"
50 Deleted "that"
51 Deleted "whole"
52 Deleted "a secular"
53 Deleted "charity"
54 Moved "the first command of charity"

Session 12: no date

Leo Strauss: That was even better than your first.[i] This does not mean that I agree with every point you make, but it was a very thorough and thoughtful paper and based on excellent analysis. I had some difficulty [at] first with your statement in which you asserted bluntly but clearly that from Spinoza's point of view there is an eternal necessity for superstition, and I wanted to ask you why. Why is this true of Spinoza? And I believe in your statements near the end of the paper it became clear. The view as stated in the *Theological-Political Treatise*[1]—notice this qualification in which the whole argument rests on charity—is indeed based on the Bible, claims to be based on the Bible. Natural reason does not support it. Justice is another matter. Therefore I think one must make a distinction between justice and charity. You can, however, say justice in[2] [a] substantive sense because, as you know, what he means by justice is simply obedience to the positive law, and that of course is not something very interesting. It is in no way a limitation on the sovereign. And to that extent you are right, but it would be simple to speak only of charity.[3] [This] principle of human life, and of human society,[4] is the basis of the teaching of the *Theological*[-*Political*] *Treatise*, and according to Spinoza himself this is based on the Bible, i.e., on something which has no intrinsic authority. And to that extent you are right. And therefore we must see whether the *Political Treatise* will give us a foundation of society in which there is no need for religion as a basis of society. There were of course traces of such a purely philosophic doctrine of the state in Spinoza. We may perhaps find some passages today, but still one could say—and I haven't re-read the *Political Treatise* for more than ten years so this will be from memory, but if I remember well, Spinoza's teaching in the *Political Treatise* is that you need an established religion in a republic, aristocratic or democratic. You do not need an established religion in a monarchy, i.e., if you have such a concentrated power, temporal power as in an absolute monarchy, you don't need any other social bond. Then force will do it. But if you have a weaker form of government, a less concentrated form of government, aristocracy or democracy, then you need religion as a social bond. And since this religion cannot be theoretically true it may be called, at least not without grave injustice to Spinoza, superstition. He doesn't [always] call it superstition,[5] as you know. But I repeat, I am very greatly pleased with your paper. There is one point which did not come out quite clearly; we will bring it up when we discuss it.

In chapter 20 there is a constant oscillation between a limitation of freedom of opinion and the absence of any such limitation. He is tending toward the position where only actions can be punished, not any speeches. Do you remember? And then there are also passages of the opposite kind. But he is tending toward this liberal notion[6] which is so powerful in the world, especially in the Western countries, that only actions can be punished, not speeches of any kind. But there are also passages of the opposite kind. At the end of the last meeting you said you had not understood chapter 17, and I was waiting for a statement of yours either in your paper or in an addendum to it as to what you saw as the difficulty in chapter 17.

Student: Well, the difficulty that I saw is the question of monarchy, in what place the monarchy was safe.

LS: Moses's own monarchy?

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[i] Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

Student: Yes.

LS: Yes, all right, you said something about this subject in your paper. Now in other words, you can have an absolute monarchy which is a) non-democratic by being monarchic, b) which is not liberal by not permitting any freedom of thought, any freedom of speech. And that can in itself work, i.e., last for centuries, so why not that? Was this your problem?

Student: Yes.

LS: How would you answer that now?

Student: This, as I indicated in my paper—the answer would seem to be that if this is a limitation of man's whole being,[7] [it would not be] the proper function of the state. Even if the state has the absolute right to do such an action, this would still prevent a man from [inaudible] his rationality.

LS: Yes, but this is too simple. I mean, now, you take one set of Spinoza's passages by which you substantiate what you said but you forgot others. Don't forget the statement which made such an impression on Mr. ____, if I remember well, where he says a man can be free in every society—the truly rational man, i.e., he could[8] be free even in Turkey. You know, the example was given in the preface of Turkey, where all freedom of thought was stamped out, and that lasted for centuries. Well, Spinoza knew that there were in Turkey high officials of the Turkish empire who were philosophers and didn't believe what the Sultan and his ecclesiastical advisors said, and therefore it would seem to work.

Student: But even so, even if a philosopher [inaudible].

LS: Why? On what ground? Not for himself, then.

Student: For himself.

LS: Why? Why does he need it?

Student: In a monarchy the philosopher, let us say, would still be able to live in freedom. If he broke a law he would understand why he must pay because he would be able to obey the monarch's laws, he would understand what he must obey. But the monarchy would still in that sense be a bad state.

LS: Why? From the philosopher's point of view?

Student: Yes, from the philosopher's point of view, because the philosopher would still see that the monarchy is not doing all it could to educate and develop the people's rationality.

LS: Yes, but if this rationality is not so developable (if I may say so) as we believe—in other words, if that gulf separating the few from the many is eternal, as Spinoza suggests more than once, what reason could the philosopher have?

Student: This is the difficulty I had with the passage on the enlightenment of the people, that these, the enlightened ones are the only ones who would be the most difficult for the state to hold, but obviously . . .

LS: The gentlemen, that would be the gentlemen.

Student: But the enlightened ones . . .

LS: These are the gentlemen. All right, if we apply the Aristotelian or Platonic triads—the philosophers, the gentlemen, and the many—the ones who are really suffering are the gentlemen. And the question would be: Why is the philosopher interested in the gentlemen, a different class? But we have now at least clarified the problem to which we must try to find an answer in these three chapters. Now let us turn to our texts at the beginning of chapter 18. Spinoza says the Hebrew republic, the Mosaic commonwealth, could have lasted forever—naturally, for it was a theocracy including an absolute prohibition against philosophy. There was no possibility of internal destruction. But still, it has one defect. If you turn to page 237, paragraph 2. Will you try your hand at reading today?

Reader:

> Furthermore, such a form of government would only be available for those who desire to have no foreign relations—

LS: Would be useful only for those[9] which lived for themselves without external—you can say relations but the word is *commercium* which means also commerce. And I believe that is not unimportant, this implication.

Reader:

> but to shut themselves up within their own frontiers, and to live apart from the rest of the world; it would be useless to men who must have dealings with other nations—

LS: Again, *commercium,* which also means commerce.

Reader:

> so that the cases where it could be adopted are very few indeed. (*TPT*, chap. 18)

LS: Yes. Let us stop here. Now this is a very important point. Here we see the difference between Spinoza and[10] [the classics] very clearly. Do you remember the teaching of the third book of the *Laws,* for example? And the seventh book of the *Politics*?

Student: Basically he argued that commerce or relations with other nations should be minimized, and only a few exceptional persons should be allowed to travel.

LS: In other words, the polis must be self-sufficient to the highest possible degree. It can never be one hundred percent self-sufficient, but this doesn't do away with the fact of the maximum [*autarcheia*[ii]], you know, in Greek, now well known in twentieth-century literature. So that is a crucial difference, and commerce in particular plays a very great part there. Spinoza does not here deal openly [and] say that this is a defect, *autarcheia*, but he means it. And we will see later on that this is of some importance, and we can easily lead it up to the principle[11] [that] the end of the state, as far as we have seen hitherto, is the subrational good, as I called it, of comfortable self-preservation. That means the commercial state, because comfortable self-preservation requires imports. No state has enough of[12] [everything]. You must not think of such tremendous states like the United States now, but take any smaller state and you will see that you cannot possible have everything required for comfortable self-preservation. Even the United States needs imports, but less visibly than a smaller state. So this is one important consideration.

In the sequel he speaks of the fact that the Hebrew commonwealth was a model because its judiciary was independent of the priesthood, i.e., the priesthood had no power to punish, to excommunicate, and so on; that depended entirely on a secular judiciary. In the sequel, that must be on page 238, paragraph 2 or 3, where he speaks of sects—do you have that? The first point he makes [is] that there were no sects in their religion.

Reader:

> That there were no religious sects, till after the high priests, in the second commonwealth, possessed the authority to make decrees, and transact the business of government. In order that such authority might last for ever, the high priests usurped the rights of secular rulers, and at last wished to be styled kings.

LS: Yes, now I limit myself only to this point: sects are bad. And that is not even without a certain tension with perfect freedom of opinion. If there should be perfect freedom of opinion, on the contrary, a great variety of sects would seem to be the natural thing.[13] Perhaps Spinoza[14] [is referring to the] theocracy in the Hebrew commonwealth,[15] [where] of course sects were impossible; or else he[16] means [that] in a free state sects, to the extent to which they claim any influence on secular authority, are bad. That is not yet clear at this place. If you turn to page 238, paragraph 3, line 6, and read that.

Reader:

> After the high priests had assumed the power of carrying on the government, and added the rights of secular rulers to those they already possessed, each one began both in things religious and in things secular, to seek for the glorification of his own name, settling everything by sacerdotal authority, and issuing every day, concerning ceremonies, faith, and all else, new decrees which he sought to make as sacred and authoritative as the laws of Moses.

LS: Yes. In other words, an independent priesthood which is strictly bound to the interpretation of a publicly known law and has no powers beyond that, [which] can only give the response but

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[ii] This word was not transcribed and is the editor's best guess, based on the word's use a few lines down. The term, meaning autonomy, is traced back to Socrates by both Plato and Xenophon.

cannot, properly speaking, judge—that would be well. But to come to more important points, on page 239, line 8.

Reader:

> It is certain that the high priests were never so cautious in their conduct as to escape the remark of the more shrewd among the people, for the latter were at length emboldened to assert that no laws ought to be kept save those that were written, and that the decrees which the Pharisees (consisting, as Josephus says in his "Antiquities," chiefly of the common people), were deceived into calling the traditions of the fathers, should not be observed at all.

LS: Yes, that throws light on Spinoza's whole position. You remember the issue between the Sadducees and Pharisees: he had spoken before of that, the two sects, Jewish sects in the time of the Second Temple: the Sadducees the upper class, the Pharisees the lower class; the Sadducees denying resurrection of the dead, the Pharisees believing resurrection of the dead. And what is here more important, the Sadducees recognizing as law only the written law which everyone could inspect, so that there was no monopoly of legal knowledge in a priesthood or something of this kind. According to the Pharisees there was an oral law, something corresponding to equity and common law, where you had to be a legal expert to know the law, and Spinoza sides here clearly with the Sadducees—you remember, I believe this has come up before—with the upper-class Sadducees against the popular plebian Pharisees. This is one of the many passages[17] [where] we have to consider that Spinoza's siding with democracy is not such an easy thing. Read the next, page 239, the second paragraph, the beginning.

Reader:

> However this may be, we can in nowise doubt that flattery of the high priest, the corruption of religion and the laws, and the enormous increase of the extent of the last-named, gave very great and frequent occasion for disputes and altercations impossible to allay. When men begin to quarrel with the ardour of superstition, and the magistracy to back up one side or the other, they can never come to a compromise, but are bound to split into sects. (*TPT*, chap. 18)

LS: Yes. You see, that is again the question of freedom of religion. If you take the doctrine of freedom of discussion as stated by Justice Holmes and other people,[18] [they] would say: Well, clash of opinions; that's it.[iii] But this is not Spinoza's view of the situation. Yes?

Student: Doesn't Spinoza come very close to the Federalist Papers in the strong attacks on factions while at the same time maintaining the need for freedom of speech and so forth?

LS: Yes, but the faction problem in Spinoza is not so much concerned with religious factions; that is another matter. Sure, all the people regarded factions as a cancer in the body politic. That is one of the most interesting problems, the emancipation of factions, you know, as parties. That is a very long process and I think the first great theorist of the party was Burke,[19] in certain well-

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[iii] Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. was a U.S. Supreme Court Justice from 1902-1932. He is especially remembered for his famous "clear and present danger" criterion in regulating free speech (the line comes from his 1919 decision *Schenck v. United States*).

known passages.[20] Now the point here is this: either Spinoza means here that one must limit the freedom of religion lest you get sects, factions, disruption—or what else could he mean? The alternative is strict separation of church and state, so that whatever people may think religiously cannot possibly have any influence on political action and it would be harmless. It would be like two different sets of bridge players, you know, say, bridge versus whist: they can be passionately opposed to each other, but it is politically absolutely irrelevant. That may be [the] alternative. We cannot yet decide it on the basis of this. On page 240, line 3 following.

Reader:

> It is remarkable that during all the period, during which the people held the reins of power, there was only one civil war, and that one was completely extinguished, the conquerors taking such pity on the conquered, that they endeavored in every way to reinstate them in their former dignity and power. But after that the people, little accustomed to kings, changed its first form of government into a monarchy, civil war raged almost continuously; and battles were so fierce as to exceed all others recorded; in one engagement (taxing our faith to the utmost) five hundred thousand Israelites were slaughtered by the men of Judah, and in another the Israelites slew great numbers of the men of Judah (the figures are not given in Scripture), almost razed to the ground the walls of Jerusalem, and sacked the Temple in their unbridled fury. At length, laden with the spoils of their brethren, satiated with blood, they took hostages, and leaving the king in his well-nigh devastated kingdom, laid down their arms, relying on the weakness rather than the good faith of their foes. A few years after, the men of Judah, with recruited strength, again took the field, but were a second time beaten by the Israelites, and slain to the number of a hundred and twenty thousand, two hundred thousand of their wives and children were led into captivity, and a great booty again seized. Worn out with these and similar battles set forth at length in their histories, the Jews at length fell a prey to their enemies.
>
> Furthermore, if we reckon up the times during which peace prevailed under each form of government, we shall find a great discrepancy. Before the monarchy forty years and more often passed, and once eighty years (an almost unparalleled period), without any war, foreign or civil. After the kings acquired sovereign power, the fighting was no longer for peace and liberty, but for glory; accordingly we find that they all, with the exception of Solomon (whose virtue and wisdom would be better displayed in peace than in war) waged war, and finally a fatal desire for power gained ground, which, in many cases, made the path to the throne a bloody one.

LS: Yes. You see, that is one substantive argument against monarchy, and to that extent in favor of democracy. Popular government is preferable to kingship because of its peaceful character both regarding civil and foreign wars. This argument which plays such a great role—I referred to [it] last time—and of which you find a discussion in one of the first *Federalist Papers*.[iv][21] [Page 241].

[iv] *Federalist* no. 6.

Reader:

> How dangerous it is to refer to Divine right matters merely speculative and subject or liable to dispute. The most tyrannical governments are those which make crimes of opinions, for everyone has an inalienable right over his thoughts—nay, such a state of things leads to the rule of popular passions.

LS: Yes, the wrath of the plebs. *Plebis ira*. Go on.

Reader:

> Pontius Pilate made concession to the passion of the Pharisees—

LS: Again, wrath, *ira*.

Reader:

> in consenting to the crucifixion of Christ, whom he know to be innocent. Again, the Pharisees, in order to shake the position of men richer than themselves, began to set on foot questions of religion, and accused the Sadducees of impiety, and, following their example, the vilest hypocrites, stirred, as they pretended, by the same holy wrath which they called zeal for the Lord, persecuted men whose unblemished character and distinguished virtue had excited the popular hatred, publically denounced their opinions, and inflamed the fierce passions of the people against them. (*TPT*, chap. 18)

LS: That is all we need. Again wrath, savage wrath. Now here you have the argument stated somewhat differently: freedom of opinion or else rule of popular fanaticism. That is the point. That is what he means by wrath. The vulgar, the people, are the locus of fanaticism.[22] And that is of course in itself a terrific argument against democracy, but Spinoza has somehow to live with it. The ruling people must be the rational people, those who were called the shrewder men, the more prudent sort in an earlier passage, and here you see the reference to these wealthier people. Now politically speaking, these more prudent sort are the wealthier people. This thought some of you—well, you are all too young for that, but you may know it historically: in the late nineteenth century this phrase occurred in European countries "the circles of wealth and education (or culture)." That goes somehow together. They should be the people who are in control. That is of course the old notion and [one] which Spinoza still admits. He only tries to combine this somehow with democracy. The ruling people must be the rational people who as such will best take care of[23] the subrational goal of the multitude [also]. That was the hope, the hope that this would work out.

And [about] the more wealthy people: now the reference to commerce at the beginning of the chapter, which you may remember—I would say what Spinoza has in mind is really a commercial patriciate and no longer a rural squirearchy as the older political thinkers meant. [A] commercial [society], and therefore [one] open to enlightenment, travel, traveling, widening the horizon, and this is what Spinoza had in mind. And that was of course what [24]between democracy and the old regimes (the *ancien regimes*) played such [an important] role: the commercial patriciate in control. And the technique was very simple: property qualification for the vote. You know there are various ways in which you can handle that. You can give higher

voting power to the wealthy by a class system of voting.[25] Gerrymandering is also a form which is more compatible with a formal democracy. Something of this kind Spinoza surely had in mind.

To repeat, the freedom of opinion—well, [26][what] is the argument? If you do not have freedom of opinion, the popular mind will be possessed, occupied by those most capable to fanaticize: the people. These can never be the enlightened men. They will be men who have a priestly cast of mind. And so either you accept that,[27] the control of society by priests or by men of the priestly cast, or else you accustom even the common people to accept a perfect freedom of opinion, and then you have a tolerably free society. In the immediate sequel on page 241, line 1 from bottom, we have another remark which we must read.

Reader:

> This wanton licence being cloaked with the specious garb of religion could not easily be repressed, especially when the sovereign authorities introduced a sect of which they were not the head—

LS: You see, that is the point: a sect of which they were not the head. If the sovereign authorities—if the ruling class, in other words, is itself the head and even the originators so to speak of the religion, that's fine. But if the religion has no authority of its own, then and only then does the danger arise—a danger that does not arise under the conditions of paganism, where[28] the religion is the religion of the city. It arises only if the religion is imported, and that of course is the case in all Christian communities. [29]Go on where we left off.

Reader:

> they were then regarded not as interpreters of Divine right, but as sectarians—that is, as persons recognizing the right of Divine interpretation assumed by the leaders of the sect. The authority of the magistrates thus became of little account in such matters in comparison with the authority of sectarian leaders before whose interpretation kings were obliged to bow.

LS: Yes. It is clear [that] if there is an authority of religion which is not dependent on civil authority, then the interpreters of the religion have a higher authority than the civil sovereign. And if that is a basic evil, this evil must be remedied. How? Spinoza says in the sequel.

Reader:

> To avoid such evils in a state, there is no safer way than to make piety and religion to consist in acts only—that is, in the practice of justice and charity, leaving everyone's judgment in other respects free.

LS: You see, that is clear. Spinoza's solution is tailored to the problem created by Christianity. Religion has an independent authority and one cannot do away with that. The only way out is [a] new interpretation of Christianity, of the Bible, the new interpretation being only charity and justice—no opinions being authoritative—and then showing of course that the first command of justice or charity is to obey the secular power. Then it is the perfect solution under these conditions.[30] That is straight Hobbes.

Student: Does Spinoza consider in his *Ethics* or anywhere the danger of creating a society of hypocrites through this medium?

LS: Oh, he speaks of that at great length in chapter 20. We don't have to go to the *Ethics*. [One reason for] his plea for perfect freedom of speech, and no interference with opinions or speech in any way, only with actions,[31] [is that] the alternative is hypocrisy. In a crude way that is obviously true, but in a stricter way it is not true. And I remind you of those beatniks in California who complained that if they could not express their feelings, what would they do? That example is probably my invention, but it is perfectly adequate. Some people seem to feel that it would be wonderful to cut another human being into eighty-four pieces, and their sincerity demands of them that they express it. And then there comes a foolish judge[32] [who] says that is obscene; and then they get someone from New York who tells the jury or the judge[33]: You don't know what art is; that is art. There you have it again. In other words, a certain hypocrisy is inevitable. Humanity consists in not saying everything one thinks. If we all would always say to one another clearly and frankly what we think of one another, [of] our actions or whatnot, it would be unbearable. The word hypocrisy is a bogey if it is not thought through. We must understand what we mean. Certain opinions. if they flit through our minds, we ought to suppress. So the question then is only where to draw the line. Surely that is the difference between a hypocrite and not a hypocrite, but the question is [that] that must be intelligently understood.

Student: When you said Spinoza's opinion was tailored to suit Christianity, do you mean only the rhetorical argument?

LS: If you take the *Theologico-Political Treatise* as a whole, it is based on the premise that the Bible is the word of God, and on this premise Spinoza tries to show what the right order of society is. We know that he undermines this very premise in the book by denying the belief in miracles, the possibility of miracles, and so on, and therefore we must also find the sketch, the outline, of a non-theological or a purely philosophic argument.

Student: What I meant was this other thing also influenced by Christianity, the true argument.

LS: Well, if I understand Spinoza's argument correctly, there would be a need for a civil religion under all circumstances, and the question is only what kind of civil religion. Theoretically, the pagan solution might be preferable. Practically it is absurd, given the state of the world. Therefore the only practical way is to accept the Bible as the document of popular instruction and to interpret the Bible in a way which would be compatible with reasonable politics. Now the ground was of course prepared by people who sincerely believed in the Bible, by a number of sects who [had] reduced dogma to a minimum, number one; and also reduced ceremonial [activities, sacraments] to a minimum[34]. There were such things: There are no sacraments proper, they said, and the dogma is only what you find explicitly stated. Of course there is a God who takes care of men and punishes the unjust, etc.—the most simple notions. And Spinoza improves on that a bit. But as I made clear, Hobbes has the same problem but[35] he insists on a teaching peculiar to the New Testament, whereas Spinoza wants to have a teaching which is neutral to the difference between Old and New Testaments.[36] [Hobbes] therefore says the dogma is "Jesus is the Messiah." "Jesus is the Messiah"—but then the practical point is[37] of course [not that] Jesus

is the Messiah, but how to understand give to Caesar what is to Caesar, and especially [that] one must obey God more than man. That is the crucial point. And Hobbes, when he comes to that, says: Of course one must obey God more than man, just as Spinoza said, but how do we know what God means? And then the answer is: You know it only from the mouth of the civil sovereign. He will not say anything which is harmful to the civil sovereign. That's it.

But the serious problem, to repeat, is this: Is Spinoza's theoretical opinion, regardless of the practical proposals for his time, not so that a pagan civil religion would not be better theoretically than the only solution possible under the formal authority of the Bible? The chapter on civil religion at the end of Rousseau's *Social Contract*, the second chapter before the last,[38] is terribly important. It deals with the same problem. And of course Rousseau also uses certain subterfuges—that was the same. And he rejects the old solution, the pagan solution, because of the inherent savagery. If you have a strictly national religion, the foreigner is at the same time also religiously the enemy, and therefore that [inaudible]. But then he discusses the Christian solution and also indicates great difficulties there, and he comes down to the proposal which is very close to Spinoza: civil religion has really only one dogma, and that is the prohibition against intolerance—which is a bit thin for a religion, to have no other dogma. But that is[39] what Spinoza means by charity, as we have seen.

The problem remains the same, and it became changed only after the French Revolution, when the political problem appeared in an entirely different light and this kind of problem[40] disappeared from the discussion. Whether it doesn't exist in another guise or garb is another matter. Today people use entirely different terms. They speak of ideology, you know. That is what society must have, an ideology. You must have heard the expression. The only question is: What does that mean? Why do you need that and what does it mean? That is the present-day substitute for what was formerly meant by the problem of civil religion.

Now let us see. There are a few more passages. The solution is, in other words, as he says in the immediate sequel, the sovereignty of the civil power. That is the only solution. But that is not sufficient. What if the civil power is both democratic and orthodox? You wouldn't get freedom.[41] That would be misery for the philosophers and especially for these more prudent sort, the enlightened commercial patriciate. They would suffer from it, because if they were strictly orthodox-democratic, there would be laws against luxury—against luxury, an old story. There might be a prohibition against interest-taking, against usury. That wouldn't be good from the point of view of a commercial patriciate; there would be all kinds of limitations there. But if the civil power is monarchic and orthodox, that would be misery for everyone—for the plebs, too. They would be satisfied in their fanaticisms, but in their objective interests regarding security and some reasonable comfort, they would be cheated by such an omnipotent monarch, omnipotent by virtue of the fact that he is supported not only by secular power but by religious beliefs as well.[42] Something of this kind must have been in Spinoza's mind.

In the sequel he discusses a practical question, namely, can you have a [inaudible]? Popular government is preferable to a monarchy, but that doesn't mean that a popular government is possible everywhere—the old story, you know, that what is best is not everywhere possible. A popular government is not proper for a people accustomed to royal authority. Proof, according to Spinoza: England. England was accustomed to royal authority under the Stuarts. Then they tried

to establish a republic, and what came of it? First Cromwell, and then Charles II.[v] So the English are not fit for popular government. Up to that time it wasn't settled yet. Up to that time they hadn't proven it, really. That came only after the Glorious Rebellion, which is for this reason called Glorious—I mean, for the promises it contained.[vi]

Now then, what about Rome?[43] That is interesting, on page 243, bottom.

Reader:

> It may perhaps be objected that the Roman people was easily able to remove its tyrants, but I gather from its history a strong confirmation of my contention. Though the Roman people was much more than ordinarily capable of removing their tyrants and changing their form of government, inasmuch as it held in its own hands the power of electing its king and his successor, and being composed of rebels and criminals had not long been used to the royal yoke (out of its six kings it had put to death three), nevertheless it could accomplish nothing beyond electing several tyrants in place of one, who kept it groaning under a continual state of war, both foreign and civil, till at last it changed its government again to a form differing from monarchy, as in England, only in name. (*TPT*, chap. 18)

LS: Yes. In other words, Caesar. Now you see, he can't possibly deny that Rome remained a republic from 510 until Caesar, at least 500 years. But Spinoza says: No, that is not popular government; that was an oligarchic tyranny. Now I am not going into the question of the historical truth of Spinoza's contention. What is interesting is only to see that Spinoza rejects Rome as a model. That is one of the striking differences between him and Machiavelli, and that connects Spinoza with Hobbes. That is not unimportant because it is one sign of the many signs that the classical character of classical antiquity ceases to be recognized. You know modern science was of course the decisive thing: the authority of all earlier science faded into insignificance, but also in political institutions. You must not forget that Rome remained the model long beyond Spinoza, and you don't have to think only of the French Revolution where it is so obvious, there are examples in this country too. How did they sign the articles in the Federalist Papers? Publius. So Rome still stood for *the* republic in spite of these remarks of Spinoza, but it is interesting that Spinoza had already broken with that. The Dutch of course are fit for popular government, and that is all to the good because Spinoza wrote under the Dutch government.

Now let us turn to chapter 19. The thesis of chapter 19 is that religion is wholly under the power of the sovereign. He shows [this] in the first paragraph, which is not too difficult to understand

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[v] Charles I was excuted in 1649, and there followed the "Long Parliament," during which Oliver Cromwell served as the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland until the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, when Charles II, son of Charles I, became monarch.

[vi] The Glorious Revolution, which overthrew James II and replaced him by the Dutch stadtholder William and his wife Mary, in fact took place in 1688, after the death of Spinoza (1677). However, Spinoza did live through the English civil war and reign of Oliver Cromwell. One of Spinoza's rabbis, Menassah ben Israel, travelled to England during Cromwell's reign and successfully petitioned for the legal return of Jews to the country, where they had been banned since 1290. It was during Menassah ben Israel's time in England that Spinoza was excommunicated from his Jewish community in Amsterdam.

although it creates a problem. External cult is wholly subject to the sovereign, which doesn't necessarily mean that the sovereign will prescribe in all details the public cult, but [that] the sovereign can decide as to which external cults will be permitted and which will not. Not the internal cults, Spinoza says,[44] what you think in your heart—justice and charity and obedience to God, that is not and cannot be subject to the sovereign. Now let me see where that is, whether we find that passage. "What I understand here by the kingdom of God I believe will be sufficiently clear from chapter 14, for there we have shown that he fulfills the law of God who cultivates justice and charity by virtue of divine mandate." Do you have that? [Page 246.] Can you go on from there?

Reader:

> If, therefore, I show that justice and charity can only acquire the force of right and law through the rights of rulers, I shall be able—

LS: Of right and mandate. That he doesn't bring out—the term used before.

Reader:

> I shall be able readily to arrive at the conclusion (seeing that the rights of rulers are in the possession of the sovereign), that religion can only acquire the force of right by means of those who have the right to command, and that God only rules among men through the instrumentality of earthly potentates.

LS: Yes. Turn to page 247, paragraph 2.

Reader:

> Justice, therefore, and absolutely all the precepts of reason, including love towards one's neighbor, receive the force of laws and ordinances solely—[45]

LS: Of mandate. The power of right and mandate.

Reader:

> through the rights of dominion—

LS: Yes. Let us stop here. You see what he says. The internal cult of God, religion proper, consists in charity, in obedience to God's mandate. That's the first formulation. But the second formulation is that this demand of charity acquires the force of a mandate only through the act of the civil power, civil governor; i.e., there is no law of charity, no command of charity, except insofar as such a command is given by the civil sovereign. What you have on the basis of the Bible is legally not more than a counsel. It takes on the character of a mandate, of a commandment, only through act of the civil sovereign. Let us turn to page 248, paragraph 1, the last sentence.

Reader:

> We may therefore draw the general conclusion that religion, whether revealed through our natural faculties or through prophets, receives the force of a

command solely through the decrees of the holders of sovereign power; and, further—

LS: Keep this in mind[46] as we go on. Do you see the crucial point? There is no commandment to be charitable except by virtue of an act of the civil authority. The Bible in itself has no legal authority whatever. Go on.

Reader:

that God has no special kingdom among men, except in so far as He reigns through earthly potentates.

We may now see in a clearer light what was stated in Chapter IV, namely, that all the decrees of God involve eternal truth and necessity, so that we cannot conceive God as a prince or legislator giving laws to mankind.

LS: In other words, there is even a metaphysical reason for that, because God cannot be a legislator; hence, there cannot be divine commandments strictly speaking.

Reader:

For this reason the Divine precepts, whether revealed through our natural faculties, or through prophets, do not receive immediately from God the force of a command, but only from those, or through the mediation of those, who possess the right of ruling and legislating. It is only through these latter means that God rules among men, and directs human affairs with justice and equity. (*TPT*, chap. 19)

This conclusion is supported by experience, for we find traces of Divine justice only in places where we just men bear sway—

LS: He couldn't express himself more strongly, could he? There is no trace of divine providence except through human agencies where just men rule.

Reader:

elsewhere the same lot—

LS: We have read this passage before. The denial of providence is of course [at] the basis of Spinoza's whole teaching, just as in Machiavelli. But then we should read a very important passage on page 249, paragraph 3. Let us remind ourselves [that] the commandment of charity, on which the whole argument rests, is itself not strictly speaking a divine commandment. It becomes a commandment only by virtue of the establishment by the civil authority of biblical religion. It has no inherent authority. We find an extremely interesting application in the sequel, page 249, paragraph 3.

Reader:

It is certain that duties towards one's country are the highest that man can fulfill; for, if government be taken away, no good thing can last, all falls into dispute,

> anger and anarchy reign unchecked amid universal fear. Consequently there can be no duty towards our neighbour which would not become an offence if it involved injury to the whole state, nor can there be any offence against our duty towards our neighbour, or anything but loyalty in what we do for the sake of preserving the state.

LS: So in other words, charity coincides with obedience to the civil government. So you have it both ways. The command of charity is a command only by virtue of the civil power. But whatever you may think about that the command of charity, even if it should be based on independent authority, [it] means in practice obedience to the civil power. Civil power is sitting pretty. Now go on.

Reader:

> For instance: it is in the abstract my duty—

LS: It is pious.

Reader:

> when my neighbour quarrels with me and wishes to take my cloak, to give him my coat also; but if it be thought that such conduct is hurtful to the maintenance of the state, I ought to bring him to trial, even at the risk of his being condemned to death.

LS: In other words, all the commandments of the Sermon on the Mount are subject to interpretation by the civil sovereign, naturally. But even above that, they are subject to the principle that if there are any possible conflicts between that and what any civil authority might command, the civil authority has the right of way. But let us go on here.

Reader:

> For this reason Manlius Torquatus is held up to honour, inasmuch as the public welfare outweighed with him his duty towards his children.

LS: His son.

Reader:

> This being so, it follows that the public welfare is the sovereign law to which all others, Divine and human, should be made to conform.
>
> Now, it is the function of the sovereign only to decide what is necessary for the public welfare and the safety of the state, and to give orders accordingly; therefore it is also the function of the sovereign only to decide the limits of our duty towards our neighbour—in other words, to determine how we should obey God. (*TPT*, chap. 19)

LS: Yes. In other words, we can say very simply: God commands charity, but this means, if we go into concrete things, God forbids us to turn the other cheek. Is this not a clear indication? So

there is no conflict with the Bible and Spinoza, by virtue of what can be called the emasculation of the Bible. Either the Bible contradicts reason, then it is rejected on that ground; or it is taken to agree with reason,[47] [in which case] it also disappears. Now a few more important passages. Page 250, paragraph 2, I believe. Let me see. One moment.

Reader:

> Further, in order that the Hebrews might preserve the liberty they had gained, and might retain absolute sway over the territory they had conquered, it was necessary, as we showed in Chapter XVII, that their religion should be adapted to their particular government—

LS: Alone. Government alone.

Reader:

> and that they should separate themselves from the rest of the nations: wherefore it was commanded to them, "Love they neighbour and hate thine enemy" (Matt. v. 43)

LS: Yes, he quotes Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount. This I believe means [that] there is a need for national religion in strict logic. The hatred of the enemy, which of course doesn't mean hatred of private enemy but the hatred of the foreign, that is much more in accordance with the political society than the morality of the Sermon on the Mount.[48] In the sequel he speaks of the problem created by the New Testament. Page 254, paragraph 3.

Reader:

> There remains for me to point out the cause of the frequent disputes on the subject of these spiritual rights in Christian states—

LS: Why does not he translate *semper* by always? Everyone who has had one week [of] Latin instruction knows that *semper* means "always" and not "frequently." Really, it is simply unintelligent.

Student: Where is this?

LS: "It remains to show the cause why in the Christian government, the Christian empire, this right was *always* a subject of controversy." Yes?

Reader:

> whereas the Hebrews, so far as I know, never had any doubts about the matter.

LS: You see the sharp contradiction. Always, never. He exaggerates, of course. That is[49] [why] he says "as far as I know."[50] That is an indication of something which for the moment he prefers not to know. Yes?

Reader:

> It seems monstrous that a question so plain and so vitally important should thus have remained undecided, and that the secular rulers could never obtain the prerogative without controversy, nay, nor without great danger or sedition and injury to religion. If no cause for this state of things were forthcoming, I could easily persuade myself that all I have said in this chapter is mere theorizing, or a kind of speculative reasoning which can never be of any practical use. However, when we reflect on the beginnings of Christianity the cause at once becomes manifest. The Christian religion was not taught at first by kings, but by private persons, who, against the wishes of those in power, whose subjects they were, were for a long time accustomed to hold meetings in secret churches, to institute and perform sacred rites, and on their own authority to settle and decide on their affairs without regard to the state.

LS: Yes, let us stop here. Christianity emerged as a religion not fostered, not even tolerated by the government. Hence the opposition to the government is of its essence. A little bit later, on page 255, paragraph 2: "But the situation was entirely different with the Hebrews, for their church began simultaneously with the state." There was not a church antedating the state, therefore no authority of the church independent of the state—no problem—which of course, as he knows, is an exaggeration as far as the Old Testament is concerned. But what he wants to make clear now is simply that the whole problem has been vitiated by the emergence of Christianity, or more generally by biblical religion, because the prophets of the Old Testament were also great trouble.

Reader:

> When I said above that the kings had not the same right as Moses to elect the high priest, to consult God without intermediaries, and to condemn the prophets who prophesied during their reign; I said so simply because the prophets could, in virtue of their mission, choose a new king and give absolution for regicide, not because they could call a king who offended against the law to judgment, or could rightly act against him.

LS: In other words, he tries to mitigate the dualism of temporal and spiritual power in the Old Testament. But of course to give absolution to murders is a gravely important political act, especially if the murderer is the murderer of the king. That amounts to great power.

Reader:

> Wherefore if there had been no prophets who, in virtue of a special revelation, could give absolution for regicide, the kings would have possessed absolute rights over all matters both spiritual and temporal.

LS: That is a very polite way of saying the prophets had much too much power.

Reader:

> Consequently the rulers of modern times, who have no prophets and would not rightly be bound in any case to receive them (for they are not subject to Jewish law)—

LS: But he forgets to add that they are as Christians subject to the New Testament. That makes things not better but worse.

Reader:

> have absolute possession of the spiritual prerogative, although they are not celibates, and they will always retain it, if they will refuse to allow religious dogmas to be unduly multiplied or confounded with philosophy. (*TPT*, chap. 19)

LS: One could perhaps say [that] the only limitation of the civil sovereign regarding the issue is that they should not augment the number of dogmas nor mingle religion with the sciences. I believe princes were not particularly tempted to do these kinds of things. He doesn't say they are limited by justice and charity because—I exaggerate—keeping religion in check is the highest form of charity. Does this make sense from his point of view? We cannot possibly finish the discussion of the twentieth chapter, and we must do this at some leisure because in a way the twentieth chapter is the most important chapter of the book. He is working his way toward this defense of freedom of speech, and we have seen there all kinds of complications and they must be settled to our satisfaction in chapter 20. We must see whether this is the case.[51] Is there any point you would like to bring up now which is particularly burning?

Student: Could you state [inaudible].

LS: Read the chapter heading of chapter 20. It is shown that in a free commonwealth everyone is free to think what he wants and to say what he thinks. This phrase is from Tacitus, and there are many more quotations from Tacitus and Curtius Rufus. You have a great parallel of that in Machiavelli. Machiavelli, you know, has no use for Plato and Aristotle, or for Cicero, but he has a very great use for the Roman historians. Pagan politics, if I may say so, pagan statesmanship, survives the authority of Plato and Aristotle. That has happened for some time. I mean, all these men of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who spoke with such great admiration of the glory that was Rome—the grandeur that was Rome, the glory that was Greece—they had in mind much more the political freedom of the ancient cities than philosophers. And surely that is a complicated story. Plutarch (you know, who was after all a Platonist) is always quoted throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but more the Plutarch of the *Parallel Lives* and of these political heroes of Rome and Greece rather than the philosopher Plutarch.[52]

You see, these men in the seventeenth century were certain that they had made a progress beyond all earlier thought. But they had a greater sympathy for the anti-Socratic, anti-Platonic, anti-Aristotlean thought of classical antiquity. Democritus, atomism; that was the good thing. Up to the present day, in this positivistic tradition which stems from that, you read this still today: Everything was fine in Greece; really independent thought emerged. People [have] speculated even [as to] whether the Copernican hypothesis was invented. And atomism, real science. And then these damned reactionaries from Athens, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, corrupted everything for centuries; and Aristotle became the basis of Thomism. The ecclesiastical teaching was for them a foregone conclusion. If someone has such a terrible doctrine as Aristotle—a teleological doctrine—then he of course supplies the natural basis for the rule of priests. That was how the thing shaped up in their minds. But even Democritus and whatever people survive—that was not

comparable to what they did. And of course it was decided for the popular mind only with Newton. A modern man on the basis of modern science seemed to have succeeded in giving a perfect account of all motion, terrestrial and heavenly, in a way in which it had never been done before. That settled it. That settled it, and you know that in the meantime Newton himself has been relegated to history but still the fundamental belief [remains] that these were old fogeys who have certain merits which we recognize graciously.[53] Today I think even these people would say that Plato is terribly important for the history of exact science,[54] which they completely forgot in the seventeenth century.[55] After all, the mathematical-physical tradition is much more Platonic, of course, than Democritean. That is now I think rather generally recognized, but fundamentally such people like Spinoza and Hobbes created the present-day notion which you find in Dewey and in Russell and[56] such kind of writers. The chapter on philosophy in Hobbes's *Leviathan*—chapter 46 or so, toward the end of the *Leviathan*—is *in nuce* what you get today as [an] account of the history of classical philosophy—*in nuce*. Many absurdities, especially of Aristotle, but of course also of Plato. That is seriously meant.

Student: . . . the multitude take the Bible seriously, even from Spinoza's point of view of what is most important in the Bible, and therefore wish to act charitably in cases where this might conflict with the government, why should one follow the government? Why should the multitude follow the government?

LS: Because, he would say,[57] if you resist the government and don't obey the government as far as in you lies, you bring about anarchy. Disobedience to the government,[58] that is the most uncharitable thing you can do[59] because you bring about a state where no one can cross the Midway[vii] in daytime. Now you cannot cross it in the night only. And you know, that is most uncharitable.

Student: But the multitude wouldn't reason that this would be the case, would they? They would just follow the Bible.

LS: Some of them might, say, if they see a fellow condemned to death, he would be a sheer object of pity to them. A poor fellow who was misguided, a broken home (I don't have to give you the whole story), and therefore he is only an object to be pitied and he should never be executed. He should come into a sanatorium, perhaps. They would say that, [and] that, some people of course have been thinking. And Spinoza would say: Well, what will you get? You will get a condition in which life is unsafe for everyone. Charity must be reasonable charity and not merely an irrational, if I may say so, womanish sentiment—that is what they said in former times. But it must be sensible. And charity is of course perfectly compatible with punishment.

Student: But only the philosophers would realize that, wouldn't they?

LS: Well, you don't have to be a philosopher to see the necessity of punishment, and sometimes of harsh punishment. But what Spinoza thinks is that, for example, the preachers addressing the multitude can very well make clear to them [that their first duty is to obey the government, and] not incite them to rebellion against the government[60]. That can be understood. This argument is not so difficult. I mean, whether it really meets the issue is a question, and your laughter—when

[vii] A stretch of parkland that cuts through part of the University of Chicago campus.

did you laugh? In fairness, one must say there is not really a clear cut and mathematical solution possible for the question: At what time is resistance to the government required? This is not easy to answer. I mean, both theories, the one which says everyone could resist whenever his conscience or what he calls his conscience dictates it, and the other, [which says] under no circumstances resistance are possible assertions. That is clear.[61] The line is somewhere in the middle, but how to draw it is in general terms not possible, except to use also a general term in the definition. If the crimes the government demands are incredible or unbearable or particularly inhuman, we can illustrate by examples but cannot give a systematic doctrine as to the precise line[62]—in some forms of government actions of the government may justify rebellion which would not justify rebellion in another kind of government.

Those are complicated questions. But to the extent to which Spinoza, and Hobbes too, tries to give universally valid truths, he fails, naturally. The proposition that resistance to government is illegitimate under all conditions is an absurd assertion. I mean, we have only to look around. We find some examples in history, each one of us, perhaps in different places, where he finds a resistance and cannot but say: This was a decent man standing up against sheer crooks. There are such cases. And I think you cease to talk sensibly if you say: Under no circumstances. Of course not only Spinoza said that—and Hobbes, [but] also many orthodox theologians. Naturally all the divine-right-of-kings preachers, all of them, said that: Under no circumstances can you resist a vicious king. The king is responsible only to God, because David has said that "to thee alone did I sing," and so on, and by which he laid down the highest principle of public law. The king can never sin to his people. These things don't work. Well, we don't have a theory of that today. I mean, legally I am sure every resistance to the government is a criminal offense, but whether it is a moral offense is a different story. And you know there are quite a few people who try that from time to time, and usually not the worst people. They may be misguided in the particular case but the people who are shrewdly concerned with their worldly interest have no such great difficulties on obeying the powers that be. And at the same time very decent men have no difficulties. That is a complicated question.[63]

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[1] Deleted "is"
[2] Deleted "any"
[3] Deleted "The"
[4] Deleted "that"
[5] Moved "always"
[6] Deleted "you know"
[7] Deleted "this is not"
[8] Deleted "also"
[9] Deleted "yes"
[10] Deleted "PTA"
[11] Deleted "if"
[12] Deleted "it"
[13] Deleted "Or"
[14] Deleted "either he means that we are here in a"
[15] Deleted "and there"
[16] Deleted "would"
[17] Deleted "which"
[18] Deleted "this"
[19] Deleted "you know"

[20] Deleted "Someone proposed English writers but that is not characteristic – if someone was against that everyone was that"
[21] Deleted "Do you remember which, Mr. __? No, but it was one of them, maybe five of six – in this neighborhood. That was also Spinoza's opinion. We turn to page 241, paragraph four, point two."
[22] Deleted "and therefore"
[23] Moved "also"
[24] Deleted "was"
[25] Deleted "You can also"
[26] Deleted "How"
[27] Deleted "in fact"
[28] Deleted "piety"
[29] Deleted "and therefore this arises especially"
[30] Deleted "I mean Hobbes"
[31] Deleted "one reason is"
[32] Deleted "and"
[33] Deleted "that this – you"
[34] Moved "sacraments"
[35] Deleted "since"
[36] Deleted "Spinoza"
[37] Moved "not"
[38] Deleted "in the Social Contract"
[39] Deleted "only"
[40] Deleted "has"
[41] Deleted "The answer"
[42] Deleted "That I think"
[43] Deleted "and"
[44] Deleted "to begin with"
[45] Deleted "Yes"
[46] Deleted "because"
[47] Deleted "and then"
[48] Deleted "you saw that in a way in your paper. Well, we cannot read everything"
[49] Deleted "what"
[50] Deleted "You know"
[51] Deleted "So I suggest that we do not read anything further and discuss Chapter 20 next time and we will hear your paper immediately afterward Mr. __. Chapters 1 and 3 of the *Political Treatise*."
[52] Deleted "The rejection"
[53] Deleted "You know, even"
[54] Deleted "you know"
[55] Deleted "You know"
[56] Deleted "in"
[57] Deleted "this"
[58] Deleted "and"
[59] Deleted "That is what they say"
[60] Deleted "you know, but simply say your first duty is to obey the government"
[61] Deleted "I mean"
[62] Deleted "where"
[63] Deleted "So next time, Mr. __."

Session 13: no date

Leo Strauss: In [a] way, the twentieth chapter is the most important chapter, at least from the practical point of view. Here the freedom of thought, and the freedom of speech as an unlimited freedom, is allegedly proved. And that is a kind of summary of the whole beginning[1] of chapter 20. That is on page 257.

Reader:

> If men's minds were as easily controlled as their tongues, every king would sit safely on his throne, and government by compulsion would cease; for every subject would shape his life according to the intentions of his rulers, and would esteem a thing true or false, good or evil, just or unjust, in obedience to their dictates. However we have shown already (chapter 17) that no man's mind can possibly lie wholly at the disposition of another, for no one can willingly transfer his natural right of free reason and judgment or be compelled to do so.

LS: One moment. "And to judge about anything." That doesn't come out in the translation. You remember the earlier formulations were on speculative matters, on the basis of the biblical argument. Do you remember that? Now that is universalized[2] [to] everything. On anything.

Reader:

> For this reason the government which attempts to control minds is accounted tyrannical, and it is considered an abuse of sovereignty and a usurpation of the rights of subjects, to seek to prescribe what shall be accepted as true, or rejected as false, or what opinions should actuate men in their worship of God. All these questions fall within a man's natural right, which he cannot abdicate even with his own consent. (*TPT*, chap. 20)

LS: So that seems to be a perfectly clear statement. There is a natural right to freedom of thought as a self-enforcing right. That of course would be the strongest of all rights, a right which cannot possible be interfered with.[3] What's the difficulty? That would be simple. If the mind of man is completely beyond the reach of any governmental action, the freedom of the mind is secure. The natural right of the mind is self-enforcing. What's the difficulty?

Student: The chapter on the Turks.

LS: More precisely, how can this natural right be rendered wholly ineffective?

Student: Propaganda.

LS: Yes. Let us use this simple word. So this right, in other words, is nil in principle. But what is the way out? Why then make this extreme statement of the natural right of freedom of the mind, let us say, if it is nil? Why make it? So there must be some intermediate position emerging. Now let us read the sequel.

Reader:

> I admit that the judgment can be biased in many ways, and to an almost incredible degree, so that while exempt from direct external control it may be so dependent on another man's words, that it may fitly be said to be ruled by him; but although this influence is carried to great lengths, it has never gone so far as to invalidate the statement, that every man's understanding is his own, and that brains are as diverse as palates.

LS: That is badly translated. "Has never come to that point that men did not ever experience that everyone abounds with his own opinions, with his own judgment." That means, simply stated, that everyone is so conceited, is sufficiently conceited as not to give in absolutely to another man. Yes?

Reader:

> Moses, not by fraud, but by Divine virtue, gained such a hold over the popular judgment that he was accounted superhuman, and believed to speak and act through the inspiration of the Deity; nevertheless, even he could not escape murmurs and evil interpretations. How much less then can other monarchs avoid them! Yet such unlimited power, if it exists at all, must belong to a monarch, and least of all to a democracy, where the whole or a great part of the people wield authority collectively. This is a fact which I think everyone can explain . . . for himself.

LS: Now what is the implication of that? We had first the manifest contradiction: a self-enforcing natural right to freedom of the mind; then this right is nil. Now we saw here the distinction which might solve the contradiction. What's the solution?

Student: What was the question?

LS: Contradiction: self-enforcing natural right to freedom of the mind; self-enforcing, cannot be taken away. Then it can be taken away to the extent that it can be rendered completely ineffective. What's the solution?

Student: The solution is democracy.

LS: Good. That's the point.[4] That it can be rendered ineffective is possible only in a monarchy. It is impossible in a democracy because a democracy by definition gives each member the same right as every other member. Let us see whether that is sufficient. Can we visualize any difficulty even on this level before we go on? That in a democracy this natural right which ought to be self-enforcing everywhere is in fact [not] self-enforcing?

Student: The tyrannical majority.

LS: For example, sure, via demagogues. So therefore that is not sufficient. Now let us go on. [Page 258.]

Reader:

> However unlimited, therefore, the power of a sovereign may be, however implicitly it is trusted as the exponent of law and religion, it can never prevent men from forming judgments according to their intellect, or being influenced by any given emotion. It is true that it has the right to treat as enemies all men whose opinions do not, on all subjects, entirely coincide with its own; but we are not discussing its strict rights, but its proper course of action.

LS: "But we are not disputing now about their right but about that which is useful." In other words, not about the right but about the wisdom of exercising the right. Every government, monarchic or democratic, has an unlimited right to make any decisions it pleases; therefore also any decision regarding restriction of freedom of thought. But the question is whether[5] [it] is wise to exercise that right.

Reader:

> I grant that it has the right to rule in the most violent manner, and to put citizens to death for very trivial causes, but no one supposes it can do this with the approval of sound judgment. Nay, inasmuch as such things cannot be done without extreme peril to itself, we may even deny that it has the absolute power to do them, or consequently, the absolute right; for the rights of the sovereign are limited by his power.

LS: "Are determined by his power." So what does he then say? The sovereign has at first glance an absolute right. But since right can never be divorced from the wisdom of exercising the right, therefore the government does not have an absolute right. How does this come out?

Student: Well, it would be to its self-interest to keep freedom of opinion. If it didn't, it would engender a kind of opposition which would lead to its downfall.

LS: Yes, but perhaps we should strive for somewhat greater theoretical precision. Well, generally speaking we all make a distinction between right and might, and we cannot take our bearings without making that distinction. But on the other hand, we say generally that the real contention is that of right, not the might—the might which, for example, any gangster has to shoot people, but simply that he can rightfully do it. From this point of view the legal consideration is the higher consideration, but from another point of view the legal consideration is also the lower consideration, namely, a man may have a right and yet it may not be wise to exercise that right. That is a political question. The first is a legal question. And therefore a purely legal consideration can be very bad, because as a legal consideration it does not take into consideration the question of the wisdom of exercising the right.

Now Spinoza is the opposite of a legalist in this respect, like Machiavelli, and he has a theoretical formulation which prevents him from ever being a mere legalist, and that is the equation of right and might. That is the practical meaning of that. That the government has an absolute right, whatever it may be, is a meaningless assertion if he does not have the might to do that. Now therefore, even if it were clear that the government has the right to perfect control of judgment, still we must investigate whether it can control judgment—can *in fact* control judgment. But what is the answer to that question? Can the government?

Student: Well, the Turks did.

LS: Yes, sure, but not only the Turks, also a hysteric multitude. Yes? In a democracy. Therefore, we are still where we were.[6] So in other words, the case is absolutely open still. No real answer has been given. Yes?

Reader:

> Since, therefore, no one can abdicate his freedom of judgment and feeling; since every man is by indefeasible natural right the master of his own thoughts—

LS: Well, more literally, by the highest right of nature, not "indefeasible."

Reader:

> it follows that men thinking in diverse and contradictory fashions, cannot, without disastrous results, be compelled to speak only according to the dictates of the supreme power. Not even the most experienced, to say nothing of the multitude, know how to keep silence. Men's common failing is to confide their plans to others, though there be need for secrecy, so that a government would be most harsh which deprived the individual of his freedom of saying and teaching what he thought; and would be moderate if such freedom were granted.

LS: To everyone. That is important.

Reader:

> Still we cannot deny that authority may be as much injured by words as by actions; hence, although the freedom we are discussing cannot be entirely denied to subjects, its unlimited concession would be most baneful—

LS: I beg your pardon. How does this translate, the whole apodosis of this sentence? While it would be impossible to take away this freedom entirely from the subjects, on the contrary it would be most pernicious. How does he say [that]?

Student: He says "although the freedom we are discussing cannot be entirely denied to the subjects, its unlimited concession would be most baneful."

LS: Most pernicious, yes.

Reader:

> we must, therefore, now inquire, how far such freedom can and ought to be conceded without danger to the peace of the state, or the power of the rules; and this, as I said at the beginning of Chapter XVI, is my principal object. (*TPT*, chap. 20)

LS: Yes, so really that is now the key chapter. Now what did he do in the passage which we have read? You remember the issue: at first glance it seems that there is a self-enforcing natural right

for everyone to think as he pleases; then he has shown that this right can be rendered nil by subliminal influences. So in other words, we have no indefeasible natural right. Then he started from the legal angle. There cannot be a legal limitation on[7] [how the] government[8] will exercise its influence on the thoughts of its subjects. But there are actual limitations, and that is the same thing; but these actual limitations can be rendered ineffective by forced subliminal influences. So here we are.

We make now a new step to a new part of the argument. Did you notice that? He made a transition from freedom of thinking to freedom of speaking. In other words, in a way, of course there is a freedom of thinking which cannot be subject to legal action, because the thoughts themselves as thoughts are not accessible to anyone if you don't speak. Well, there is of course a method of torture which induces people with weak nerves (and I believe the majority of men have weak nerves) to say what they think. But still, not all men can be forced that way. But speaking is an entirely different matter, that can be checked. Someone's said it in their business, and so on.[9] But that's the crucial point: he extends the natural right[10] [of] freedom of thought to the natural right of freedom of speech. But why must this natural right of speech as distinguished from the natural right to thought be granted to everyone up to this point? Why? If we do not go into the depths of the problem, it appears, to repeat, [that everyone possesses] the freedom of thought[11] by nature. No one can look into what you think. Freedom of speech is open to public inspection, therefore to legal action. Therefore also to legal prohibition. Why must the freedom of speech be granted according to the argument here? Yes?

Student: Freedom of thought could take place which [inaudible].

LS: He doesn't say a word about that here. What does he say? "For even the most experienced, to say nothing of the plebs, do not know how to be silent." This is a common vice of men, that they trust their thoughts, their plans, even when secrecy is needed, to others. In other words, a failing, a vice of man which is so powerful—that is very strange. You know that if right is based not on a virtue but on a vice, that is very remarkable. Spinoza doesn't say this in vain. We have read this passage in the sixteenth chapter[12], where he says the free man, the fully rational man, can live in every society, however tyrannical. The truly rational man does not need freedom of speech. Why [not]? Because he doesn't suffer from this vice: he can keep his mouth shut. That is very strange.[13]

The argument is wholly provisional and in a way vague up to this point. This is only a statement of the problem, not more. The freedom of speech cannot be suppressed, although he hasn't proved this, but he also says it would be most pernicious to grant unlimited freedom of speech. So the question is then this: To what extent must freedom of speech be granted? Spinoza has not proven his premise in any way, but if we approach this from a practical point of view it is a sensible statement of the problem. Complete suppression of freedom of speech is an unbearable condition, as we here in this room would all admit. It is a sound opinion to say that this must be granted. But in earlier times, at any rate, it was also a universal opinion that there are some limitations. Even today slander, obscenity, and so on are forbidden. Now let us see where Spinoza will draw the line, and especially also whether he will give any proof of the fundamental assertion, namely, that there must be a high degree of freedom of speech. That is essential. Up to now we haven't found that. Now let us go on. [Page 258, bottom.]

Reader:

> It follows, plainly, from the explanation given above, of the foundations of a state, that the ultimate aim of government is not to rule, or restrain, by fear, nor to extract obedience, but contrariwise, to free every man from fear, that he may live in all possible security; in other words, to strengthen his natural right to exist and work without injury to himself or others.
>
> No, the object of government is not to change men from rational beings into beasts or puppets, but to enable them to develop their minds and bodies in security, and to employ their reason unshackled; neither showing hatred, anger, or deceit, nor watched with the eyes of jealousy and injustice. In fact, the true aim of government is liberty.

LS: Yes. Let us stop here. So this is allegedly the base of the whole argument. The end of civil society is freedom, and this freedom includes necessarily the freedom of speech. The freedom to act according to our nature requires the freedom of speech—the end of the commonwealth. Now what have we learned before about the end of the commonwealth? What is the end of man?

Student: To develop his reason.

LS: No, there is a precise form for that: intellectual love of God. But we have also seen that this is irrelevant in a way for Spinoza's political doctrine. There was another end which we mentioned.

Student: Self-preservation.

LS: Yes, although that is Locke's, not Spinoza's, formula, but it amounts to the same thing: comfortable self-preservation. What he does here is to suggest an intermediate thing. Freedom as expressed here is higher than comfortable self-preservation but lower than the intellectual love of God. You see, that is a very interesting problem. I studied it once in a seminar on Kant where it appeared that the modern liberal doctrine is trying to find a formula for the political principle which is equally applicable to all men so that it gives the highest type of man his opportunity equally as it gives the lowest type of man his type of opportunity.[14] That is freedom as Kant, for example, defined it. Freedom means then the right to do anything which does not conflict with the same freedom in everyone else. That seems to be an absolutely rational principle because of its universality. You claim for yourself a right, say, to shoot anyone whom you don't like, whose face doesn't please you. That doesn't work because it gives the other fellow the same right to shoot you, and that, as a man of ordinary sense, you wouldn't want to do.

But there are certain freedoms which you cannot claim for yourself without claiming them for everyone else. That would be the rational freedoms. That is a way in which this modern thought in its more reflective forms proceeds, and with which such people as Kant and Spinoza, in spite of all their oppositions, are concerned. The question is whether such a universal formula is possible. That is a great problem. In Kant one can perhaps answer the problem as follows. From Kant's point of view, it would seem that the right to moral action, to strictly moral action, as a

right which every man can exercise, would be the sensible political principle. But that of course would never lead to the liberal state as he meant it, because[15] [the liberal state] includes also considerable right to immoral action. As Kant put it, the right to freedom, which includes the right of freedom of speech of course, is a right to say the truth or to lie. Now the right to say any truth, it is clear, is a moral right. The right to lie is not a moral right.

Now what can be the reasoning behind that thought, that you must also grant the right to lie? That cannot follow from morality as morality, because morality gives you the right only to say the truth. Politically speaking, practically speaking, the right to speak which is limited to the right to say the truth means severe censorship, obviously. I mean, everyone can be subjected to legal action when he lies, and not only when he cheats regarding his merchandise (that is a fairly limited case) but in every way. It[16] [wouldn't] work. So in other words, if you want to have reasonable leeway and not constant hampering by censorship or whatnot—police, [for example]—then you must really allow considerable leeway for the immoral exercise of your powers. In practice of course this is always done. Prostitution is forbidden but it is tolerated, and this kind of thing; you know the famous concession which the legislator [makes] everywhere, at least in[17] enforcement, to human failings. But people like Spinoza and Kant, these modern thinkers, what they were trying to do was to find a universally valid principle for the peculiar leniency which the sensible legislator has. A universally valid principle, mind you. You see what I mean, because these leniencies differ naturally in practice from country to country, and from age to age. But what is the principle underlying it? That was the question.

The formula for that was this: we must find a clear distinction between the sphere of morality and the sphere of law. This was never in this form attempted. I mean, there is a distinction in fact between what the positive law really makes enforceable and what it does not enforce, but that was left vague because that depends on judgment. In a certain situation you may be much more strict, in other situations you must be less strict. There was no simple formula. What these men in the seventeenth and eighteenth century tried to find was a universally valid formula in order to get the maximum of freedom. That was the idea behind it. The difficulty is of course smaller for those who do not have strong moral principles; then you can take such a thing like comfortable self-preservation, and everything which does not interfere with comfortable self-preservation must be tolerated.[18] Therefore prostitution, if some people like that, you know, why not? But [with] the people of strong moral principles who were at the same time libertarians, there you have a problem, and only there do you find the problem. And therefore[19] Kant [especially] is important; to some extent also Spinoza.

Student: Is the notion of liberty here the same as that of freedom? Are they interchanged?

LS: They are interchanged. Just the use of the Latin or the Teutonic word—it doesn't make any difference.

Student: Because this is the first time I have noticed the word in the book.

LS: No, it doesn't make any difference. *Libertas*. Latin.

Student: Also, this rational statement is the exact same statement that John Stuart Mill—

LS: Yes, surely.[20] [Mill] is an heir to that tradition. But what does rational freedom mean? If you were to ask an old-fashioned man, he would say that rational freedom is the freedom to act virtuously.

Student: Well, the Mill story is, I suppose,[21] the rational freedom to do anything which doesn't interfere with this same freedom of others.

LS: Yes, that is a moral ground.

Student: That is in practice limited in a hundred different ways.

LS: Which way?

Student: This principle of freedom.

LS: Yes, but what these people believed in the classic age of liberals was that there is one and only one way in which it can be done, and therefore it is a really good principle.[22] The word for freedom is of course the same word [as for liberty]. That is nothing but a false semantic problem. The problem is this: all sensible people were always in favor of freedom. On the other hand,[23] there must be some limitations of freedom, and therefore they all said unanimously: Freedom, yes; license, no. That is trivial. The question is how to draw the line between freedom and license, not in this or that particular sense but in principle.

In the older view, the premodern view of this, the limitation comes from above. Let us call that the vertical limitation: either by the will of God or by reason, that doesn't affect the principle from a higher point of view. The simple formula: freedom for good action. A tyrannical government is a government which prevents virtuous action. A government which prevents vicious action is not tyrannical because it helps every man to perfection. This can however be an extreme, and from the point [of view] of our pleasure-loving self, it can be a very annoying government. In a way it treats even grownups as children. Paternalistic.

Now the modern view said [that] there must be a limitation of freedom, but the limitation must be horizontal: each man limiting the other. [And] universalizing [that]: all men limiting each other. And they said this is not only more free, it is also much more practical because license limited from above would mean limited by God, and since this limitation does not visibly take place (the immortality of the soul not being obvious), then it would mean a limitation by reason. But reason is ineffective most of the time. Read Locke in the first book of his *Essay on Human Understanding* when he says: Where is the conscience when you look at the sacking of a town?[i] What is going on? They are all supposed to possess consciences, but it is wholly ineffective. But the other fellow who is hurt by what you do, he acts. The horizontal limitation of license is self-enforcing. The vertical is not self-enforcing, and therefore it means that it is mere exhortation. You preach: Be good. And that is ridiculous, he says; that is wholly ineffective. You know what they say about non-descript candidates in this country: He is in favor of virtue. That is politically meaningless. The real thing is mutual action by other men.

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[i] Locke, *Essay on Human Understanding*, book 1, section 9.

In Locke's *Civil Government*, the Second Treatise, this thought is rather clearly developed provided one reads carefully enough, this thought of the mutual limitation, the horizontal as distinguished from the rational which only dictates and counsels but which has no teeth in it.[24] One can perhaps say this: the objection of the moderns to this was that reason doesn't have any teeth in it. The other fellow whom you hurt has teeth, or muscles. That is a problem. To repeat, to speak of freedom in general is not very helpful. I mean, there are very few people who hated freedom or dared to say that they hated freedom as such. They are not serious men. This is the concrete problem and it is really a problem.

The question is whether this modern attempt to get a universal formula—I'll put it this way [LS writes on the blackboard]—did succeed. You see also that is the same problem as the one I said before,[25] the clear universal dividing line between morality and law. Law is that (horizontal)[ii]—I mean, not the details of positive law but the principle of what could[26] reasonably [be] the object, the matter, of positive law[27]; that which by its nature is[28] [such] that other people, however immoral, have an interest in it and on the basis of that interest are concerned with it. Therefore the key formula for the older thought was duty; the key formula for the moderns was right, the idea being [that] duties or whether men fulfill their duties is a very moot question. Some do at some times; no one can be assumed to do his duty all the time. But rights which coincide with the most powerful interests of each[29] are things for which people can be depended upon to fight. That was the thought behind it. Whether this was not all based on certain deep illusions is another matter, but it was historically eminently powerful.

Student: Spinoza seems to combine both lines, both the vertical and the horizontal.

LS: Yes, he tried that. The very simplistic thinkers[30]—I say this with due respect, but people like Hobbes and Locke, they said[31] crude massive things, self-preservation expanding into comfortable self-preservation. The more sophisticated among them—Spinoza, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Kant—they said: No, that will not do; there is something in man which is not satisfied by comfortable self-preservation and which is connected with a higher principle. And they were the ones who tried to find a formula which would somehow, while taking care of[32] [one], also take care of[33] [the other] and so to get a truly universal formula. That was very interesting theoretically speaking, a very interesting attempt to get a formula which, while giving full freedom to the highest of men would also give full freedom to[34] the large majority[35].

Now let us take a practical example: avarice. Traditionally, avarice was regarded as a vice and a particularly ugly vice. Think[36] [of] Dante: the avaricious are much lower than the lovers of bodily pleasure, of lust. One can understand that. But many people, and a very powerful sort of people, are concerned with such things as lucre, accumulation of money. From the traditional point of view, you have to be reasonable [about them]: they contribute something to the community, but they must be watched. What this modern doctrine wanted to do was to be so large as to give, equally and on the basis of the same principle, the same right to the lovers of virtue as to the lovers of money. You must admit this is a very practical proposition, but it has also great theoretical difficulties because money doesn't have the same status for a thinking man as virtue has. You can say[37] the consequences[38] have been in many respects beneficial, and

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[ii] The transcriber may have indicated that Strauss pointed to something he had written on the board.

[then] say: Let us forget about the complicated theoretical prehistory and limit ourselves to enjoying the beneficial consequences. That is a defensible practical proposition, but there must also be some people who think about the theoretical problems involved. And that's it. Did I answer your question?

Student: I'm not[39] [sure]; you said you might go into the kind of formulation needed to embrace both lines.

LS: The clearest formulation, I think, is that of Kant, who is in a way the end of this development, of the heroic development. Mill is already epigonic after the great characters from the French Revolution, since people began to rethink the whole thing, and Mill was so much influenced by the French socialists. I mean John Stuart Mill. His father was an old-fashioned utilitarian but he was already influenced by Saint-Simon and[40] German philosophy, although indirectly.[iii] That's already very complicated. But the classic heroic development of modern thought was before the French Revolution, where[41] one great theoretical effort after the other was made to show a new possibility of a polity which in every respect was thought to be superior to the older thought, to the classical and medieval thought. And in this connection Spinoza plays a considerable role. The reason Spinoza is so interesting is because he is one of the first, perhaps the first, who tried on the new basis—say, the Machiavellian-Hobbean basis—to bring in this higher principle to provide for the wise as well as for the vulgar; whereas in Machiavelli and Hobbes this was not the theme of the political problem. In this respect, Spinoza returns to older thought, but he transplants [it] on[to] the new basis and all difficulties come from that. And the formula "freedom is rationality" is an enigmatic formula. In one sense Spinoza means it literally: true freedom of the individual is a fully rational life as he understood it. But the multitude is incapable of that, and the state is primarily the multitude. What does rationality mean here? I don't say that he doesn't have an answer to that, but it is a more complicated problem.

Student: What does freedom mean here? The same thing? That is, insofar as they are able they are free, and they are able only insofar as they are rational?

LS: Yes, but still they cannot draw the line. [Even] if you give the non-rational man the freedom—some freedom, whatever it may be.

Student: To say what he thinks?

LS: All right, let us limit ourselves to the concrete example and say [that] whatever may be true of other freedoms, it goes without saying that what Spinoza says about speech applies equally well to property or whatever thing you might take. But he limits himself to speaking of speech only. All right, let us see whether a formula can be worked out, first on the level of freedom of speech and then on the universal level which says that there is one universal formula which is equally applicable to all men: freedom of speech. Then we have something, if it is possible to say

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[iii] John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was an important British liberal thinker. As Strauss states, his father James Mill (1773-1836) was a prominent political economist and utilitarian thinker, and the early John Stuart Mill was heavily influenced by utilitarian thinking. During a visit to Paris in his early teens, he met Henri Saint-Simon (1760-1825), an early and influential socialist thinker.

something sensible about freedom of speech as a right of everyone without any limitation of freedom by reasonableness or virtue. Let us see how Spinoza proceeds.

Now where were we? Perhaps we can continue where we left off. The immediate sequel we do not need. Spinoza makes clear something essential but also trivial. Of course no one can have the right to act as he thinks. If you think a certain law is foolish, you have no right to transgress that law, because if men would reserve the right [of each individual] to act as he thinks, society would be altogether impossible.[42] In our actions we have to obey the law, that he takes as a matter of course. But the right to speak does not have to be abandoned. There is a limitation to that, however, a little further—for example, if someone shows that a given law contradicts sound reason. Do you have that? [Page 259.]

Reader:

> For instance, supposing a man shows that a law is repugnant to sound reason, and should therefore be repealed; if he submits his opinion to the judgment of the authorities (who, alone, have the right of making and repealing laws), and meanwhile acts in nowise contrary to that law, he has deserved well of the state, and has behaved as a good citizen should; but if he accuses the authorities of injustice, and stirs up the people against them, or if he seditiously strives to abrogate the law without their consent, he is a mere agitator and rebel.

LS: Yes. In other words, he has to obey the law, number one. But he may criticize the law, reasonably criticize it. In other words, he has no right to speak seditiously or, one could almost say, propagandistically against it. If he would impugn the motives of the legislator and would say that that was dictated by big business, or that was dictated by the unions, labor unions, then it is already a question. So *decent* criticism: there is a right to decent criticism of any law. Decent, and a distinction which is not entirely uninteresting. So to some extent we have here an answer to the question: How far does the freedom of speech extend? Answer: It extends to the decent criticism of the laws. This is in practice difficult, to draw the line, because there are ways of circumventing it as you all know from Anthony: You can say all the time, yes, they are all honorable men,[iv] and then that isn't a sin. But all right, let us go on and turn to page 260, paragraph 3.

Reader:

> Hence, so long as a man acts in obedience to the laws of his rulers, he in nowise contravenes his reason, for in obedience to reason he transferred the right of controlling his actions from his own hands to theirs.

LS: Yes. That's a point which was made before but which we reconsider for one moment. For the rational man, for the sage, it is possible to live rationally. As a matter of fact, as such he lives rationally: freedom is rationality. But what does this mean if applied to society, to men at large who, as Spinoza emphasizes, cannot live rationally? There is a lowest formula for that: by obeying the law whatever the law may say, you act rationally—which in a way makes sense, namely, anarchy is the greatest of all evils and therefore any law, however stupid and vicious, is better than no law. But clearly that is not what we would call people living rationally, [people]

[iv] Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* Act III, Scene 2.

who only obey the law however stupid the law may be. So that is too little. Now let us see a bit in paragraph 4.

Reader:

> From the fundamental notions of a state, we have discovered how a man may exercise free judgment without detriment to the supreme power: from the same premises we can no less easily determine what opinions would be seditious. Evidently those which by their very nature nullify the compact by which the right of free action was ceded. For instance, a man who holds that the supreme power has no rights over him, or that promises ought not to be kept, or that everyone should live as he pleases, or other doctrines of this nature in direct opposition to the above-mentioned contract, is seditious, not so much from his actual opinions and judgment, as from the deeds which they involve; for he who maintains such theories abrogates the contract which tacitly, or openly, he made with his rulers. Other opinions which do not involve acts violating the contract, such as revenge, anger, and the like, are not seditious, unless it be in some corrupt state, where superstitious and ambitious persons, unable to endure men of learning, are so popular with the multitude that their word is more valued than the law.
>
> However, I do not deny that there are some doctrines which, while they are apparently only concerned with abstract truths and falsehoods, are yet propounded and published with unworthy motives. This question we have discussed in Chapter XV, and shown that reason should nevertheless remain unshackled.[43] (*TPT*, chap. 20)

LS: Now let us stop here for a moment. Now you see here Spinoza tries to state the limits of freedom of speech. There are forbidden opinions. I think they can be reduced first to one simple thing: anarchism. Anarchism cannot be tolerated, because these are opinions which include the acts according to Spinoza. That is the dangerous point. And the moment you admit that there are opinions which include the act, all kinds of things become possible. It is a difficult point. But he makes another limitation here by his reference to chapter 15. Do you remember what that means? I wonder—no, that is surely a misprint for chapter 14, there can be no question. Chapter 14, where he defines his opinions.[v] Do you remember what they were?

Student: Opinions which tend toward hatred and strife.

LS: No, he was more specific than that. This was a theological argument and [from] there it followed[44], for example, to believe in Providence, and primarily to believe in the existence of God. Now he gave each one the right to interpret these dogmas. For example, he could assume that *the* first cause is matter. We have seen that. He uses fire as an example; but if fire, then also matter in general. But he had to name it God. Do you remember that point? In other words, that was very common, also in Locke. Atheism is not an opinion which can be tolerated. That is implied here by Spinoza, this point. There are, Spinoza still admits, opinions which can under no

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[v] The authoritative Gebhardt *Opera* of Spinoza's work reads chapter 15, so any error here would apparently be on the part of Spinoza himself and not the translator. Martin Yaffe, in his edition of the *TTP*, says the reference is to "15.1.58-64 and context" (using the Bruder numbers; = Gebhardt 187).

circumstances be tolerated. But we can enlarge on them. For example, if someone would write a defense of murder or of other anti-social practices, that is a question, whether that is an innocent opinion. You see, he says we do not deny that there are some opinions which seem to be purely theoretical yet are propounded and divulged in an iniquitous spirit. And they are defined in chapter 14—that refers to that.

So [you] see, up to this point we have this: perfect freedom of opinion except of such opinions as would render impossible every society. Anti-social doctrines cannot be tolerated by society. That would still have the value of universality. He is looking for a universal principle. All opinions which are not clearly anti-social must be tolerated. Now let us go on.

Reader:

> If we hold to the principle that a man's loyalty to the state should be judged, like his loyalty to God, from his actions only—namely, from his charity towards his neighbours; we cannot doubt that the best government will allow freedom of philosophical speculation no less than of religion belief.

LS: We cannot doubt that the best commonwealth will concede the same freedom of philosophizing to everyone which, as we have shown, faith concedes to everyone. That is a very remarkable step. The argument, you will recall, was theological or biblical, but because the Bible does not teach anything clearly in speculative matters, it leaves the judgment free regarding such speculative matters. Therefore faith, the Bible, gives everyone the right to think and to say what he thinks in speculative matters. Now he says, no longer merely on biblical grounds, [that] everyone has the right to philosophize, and that includes of course also to publish or to say in public what the results of his philosophy are. Now turn to page 261, paragraph 1, line 2 from the bottom (I am sorry that is so complicated), where he gives another reason [for] why [there is] this universal freedom that everyone must have the right to philosophize. "No inconveniences arise from that."

Reader: You don't mean the beginning of a new paragraph on 261.

LS: No, I asked [for the passage where he says] that

> no inconveniences arise from this freedom which cannot be avoided by the authority of the magistrates as I shall show immediately. To say nothing of the fact that this freedom is altogether necessary for the promotion of the sciences and arts, for these sciences and arts are cultivated only by those successfully who have judgment which is free and to the least degree prevented or preoccupied.

In other words, here is another point, another argument which is not quite in agreement with the preceding argument. Every reasonable man wants the promotion of the arts and sciences, but the sciences and arts cannot flourish except if there is freedom for the arts and sciences. Clearly this freedom is not freedom for everyone to cultivate the arts and sciences, because some are wholly unfit for [45]this kind of thing.

Student: But who can determine that?

LS: Yes, but that is a long prudential argument. You see, what these people tried to do in the seventeenth century and in the eighteenth century was to find a universal reason, not a prudential reason. The prudential arguments in favor of freedom as it is commonly understood abound, but they wanted a demonstrative argument. That is a very rhetorical problem for us today. Why? This mathematical argument they [used] got into some trouble. We will later on see how this works out. But what was the enormous advantage of a universal, mathematical argument? If correct, [it would be] really universal. Prudential arguments are by their nature limited to the majority of cases, at the best. A prudential argument can always come into conflict with certain situations in which the opposite thing is prudential. If you have a mathematical argument—to use the language of the seventeenth century, if you have a universally valid argument—prudential arguments cannot come in. It takes a common discussion of freedom of speech. The arguments against censorship, taken from the ordinary stupidity of the censors, are practically convincing, but of course they are not conclusive in all cases. The disadvantage deriving from the stupidity of censors may in a given situation be less great than the disadvantage from the absence of censorship. All the questions of security discussed now at length—[for example], in a given case it may be better that certain scientific papers are not published. And some fellow who does not develop his scientific thought as well as he could if he had that plan—then [considering] the damage done to society is a prudential argument. If there is an unqualified right to speak or an unqualified right to publish the results of your scientific investigation, no considerations of public policy can qualify it, but if it is only a rule of thumb derivative from the fact that in most cases censors are likely to be stupid—which is a good practical premise; it is however only a good *practical* premise and therefore not universally valid. Any evil of this kind can be outweighed by an opposite evil which is greater. That depends on the circumstances.[vi]

—Think of Elizabethan England. Was there perfect freedom for Shakespeare? Surely not.

Student: On the other hand, this couldn't occur in Turkey . . . what real science . . .

LS: On the other hand, you have also many free countries without any science. The [early] Swiss cantons were republics. Until this century what was there of science?

Student: If freedom is completely wiped out . . .

LS: But the question remains, what kind of science? Our modern science is unthinkable without very expensive laboratories and so on, which really only public authorities can finance. That is wholly impossible, that there is a necessity for a perfectly free exchange of data. You must be free. But again, that you have in Russia, too.[46] [There is] a proportion: as science became politically important, it became free, without any freedom connected with that. Whatever they may do occasionally in biology, whatever they may do in this neighborhood, a physicist in Russia is treated like a raw egg. That is a German proverbial expression.

Student: But not in Spinoza's time, was it?

[vi] There was a break in or a change of the tape at this point.

LS: But you have to state the problem with more universality. Spinoza maintains that a democracy is[47] in principle more favorable to freedom than monarchy. We must see how that goes on in the *Political Treatise*. But you spoke now as the problem presents itself today, and it is necessary to consider that, because Spinoza could not have foreseen the situation now. But since he makes a universal distinction, it must also be checked against what we find now. The argument runs as follows. In the twentieth century, given the crucial importance of technology, freedom of science is indispensable—but natural science [only]. Is that not so? Of course in Russia you can't go to Khrushchev and question him, you know. Social science is a different story; we must never forget that.[48] Naturally Khrushchev too needs data for his wicked purposes, but the strange thing is he doesn't pick on scientists for getting things vital to him. I do not draw any inference from that. The question is much more complex. If we want to have a free society as intelligent beings, it is necessary that we liberate ourselves from a certain simplistic liberal myth, and that liberal myth means that political freedom, including the freedom of everyone on the basis of property or other funds to paint, to sing, to say whatever he pleases, is the condition for the highest development of the human mind. This thesis I believe is demonstrably refutable. That science in our sense of the term is today flourishing is of course true, but what about the other things, the other people? They are surely not in a more flourishing state than they were in certain flourishing periods of power. Think of the German or of the French, or English classic ages; that's not the case now. If you read the *New York Times* you can get the impression that it is the same thing, but that is taking the celebrities of today as the celebrities of tomorrow, to say nothing of the century. There you must form your own judgment. So let us not fool ourselves. Political freedom is a very great good, but it is not the *summum bonum*, the highest good on which everything depends. That is not true. That is simply a myth.[vii]

Spinoza had a certain vision of philosophy which included in principle modern natural science as it developed. That is true. But what became of that same modern science in the course of these three centuries? For Spinoza it was identical with philosophy and therefore had the dignity of philosophy, but today what is that? Technical proficiency is illimitable, but it cannot possibly raise such a claim anymore. You only have to take[49] those who are most simply believers in science (these are the logical positivists) and read what they say about science, what kind of truth it is.[50] You don't have to make philosophic studies in order to get a general awareness of what they say. You have it in English, the English language, a simple human document, and that is Henry Adams's *Education of Henry Adams*.[viii] He describes how he was impressed by science in 1859, when Darwin's great work was out, and he reached complete clarity about the whole.[ix] Well, thirty years later he returned to science, and the picture had completely changed: science had become absolutely specialist; its human meaning had almost completely disappeared. I do not deny that this later stage was in many ways the more critical stage, but at the same time of course it created also by this very fact a human problem which did not exist before. But the other document of that time which is easily accessible is Max Weber's "Science as a Vocation,"[x]

[vii] The transcriber notes that there is a portion of the tape that is unclear.

[viii] Henry Adams (1838-1918), a scion of the Adams political family, was a historian and writer, best known for his autobiographical work *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907).

[ix] In original transcript: "whole—." This may indicate an inaudible word or phrase, or simply that Strauss did not complete the thought.

[x] A lecture delivered by Weber in Munich 1917 as "Wissenschaft als Beruf." A German version and English translations are available online.

where he contrasts in a less severe way the original meaning of science, the way to heaven, the way to perfection, to virtue or whatever you call it, and says: That is simply wrong. Today science has simply nothing to with the deepest concerns. You can be a first-rate theoretical physicist and be humanly dumb, completely; whereas the original notion of science as reason, as man's perfection, had an enormous effect.

I say again, maybe reason can't do more than modern science does. I don't want to go into this question. But surely then it is of the utmost practical importance, given a technological society—we would all be helpless if science were to disappear today—and yet only [as] a means. That was a seventeenth-century conception. When we speak of the seventeenth century as the heroic age (and I think many people would say that, whatever their further thought was on it), we mean this: that was the age of very great hope and inspiration, perhaps delusion ultimately, but also we can say grandeur. This grandeur is gone. The intellectual effort which has gone into such things as the theory of relativity or of gravity (I am no judge of that) may be as great as that spent developing the laws of Newton, for all I know, but I know nothing of that. But the meaning of Newton's doctrine affected directly every thinking being.[51] He was wholly uninterested in "physics" [as] a special science like [the] others. And the whole so-called "value problem," as now stated, is derivative from that. All important decisions are outside of science, value decisions. That is what you learn in school today, at least in most schools.

Now let us go on. Let us read the next paragraph where we left off: "But let it be granted," [page 261].

Reader:

> But let it be granted that freedom may be crushed, and men be so bound down, that they do not dare to utter a whisper, save at the bidding of their rulers; nevertheless this can never be carried to the pitch of making them think according to authority—

LS: You know that this is not universally true, as Spinoza admitted: subliminal, yes. Go on.

Reader:

> so that the necessary consequences would be that men would be daily be thinking one thing and saying another to the corruption of good faith, that mainstay of government, and to the fostering of hateful flattery and perfidy, whence spring stratagems, and the corruption of every good art.

LS: So that is the other point which has been repeated, of course, very frequently: if there is no freedom of speech, hypocrisy and destruction of good faith follows. But again, we must ask the question—let us investigate the history of mankind [and see] whether that was universally true. Go on.

Reader:

> It is far from possible to impose uniformity of speech, for the more rulers strive to curtail freedom of speech, the more obstinately are they resisted; not indeed by the avaricious, the flatterers, and other numskulls, who think supreme salvation

> consists in filling their stomachs and gloating over their money-bags, but by those whom good education, sound morality, and virtue have rendered more free. Men, as generally constituted, are most prone to resent the branding as criminal of opinions which they believe to be true, and the proscription as wicked of that which inspires them with piety towards God and man; hence they are ready to forswear the laws and conspire against the authorities, thinking it not shameful but honourable to stir up seditions and perpetuate any sort of crime with this end in view. (*TPT*, chap. 20)

LS: In other words, what he says here is this. The freedom of speech is demanded precisely by the men of noble character, the proud, self-respecting men, and that shows that there is a kinship between freedom of speech and nobility of character. The gentleman—to use the traditional distinction as in Aristotle [between] the wise, the gentleman, the vulgar—the gentlemen cannot stand that. He goes on to develop in the sequel the thought that, for example, the sanctification of opinions by law—if it is forbidden to criticize certain opinions, and thus opinions are by law sanctified—makes impossible later change of the laws which are based on these opinions. And sooner or later the time will come when laws, whatever the law may be, will have to be changed. And then there are some very glowing passages which however repeat in principle only what was said: the experience, the daily experience, which shows these noble characters risking their lives for their opinion.

But then of course the question comes up, in other words, [of] what can be called the political crimes—a distinction which was then introduced later on between political crimes and common crimes, with the notion of a revolutionary as a noble character.[52] We are compelled to reconsider that on the basis of the experience of the twentieth century, to disregard all other considerations. We know Spinoza made in his (how do you call it?), his notebook—he made a drawing of himself in the garb of Masaniello, a revolutionary in Naples in his time.[xi] So Spinoza had a certain sympathy with the revolutionary movements going on in his time. That is quite serious in him, but that of course does not settle the theoretical question.

Let us turn a little bit later, on page 263, where he speaks of the democratic government. The last sentence on the page.

Reader:

> In a democracy (the most natural form of government, as we have shown in Chapter XVI) everyone submits to the control of authority over his actions, but not over his judgment and reason; that is, seeing that all cannot think alike, the voice of the majority has the force of law, subject to repeal if circumstances bring about a change of opinion. In proportion as the power of free judgment is withheld we depart from the natural condition of mankind, and consequently the government becomes more tyrannical.
>
> In order to prove that from such freedom no inconvenience arises, which cannot easily be checked by the exercise of the sovereign power, and that men's actions can easily be kept in bounds, though their opinions be at open variance, it will be

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[xi] See session 1, n. ii.

> well to cite an example. Such a one is not very far to seek. The city of Amsterdam reaps the fruit of this freedom in its own great prosperity and in the admiration of all other people. For in this most flourishing state, and most splendid city, men of every nation and religion live together in the greatest harmony, and ask no question before trusting their goods to a fellow-citizen, save whether he be rich or poor—

LS: Riches are an important consideration.

Reader:

> and whether he generally acts honestly, or the reverse. His religion and sect is considered of no importance: for it has no effect before the judges in gaining or losing a cause, and there is no sect so despised that its followers, provided that they harm no one, pay every man his due, and live uprightly, are deprived of the protection of the magisterial authority.

LS: I think we can stop here. In other words, Spinoza gives here an empirical, experimental proof of the possibility of such perfect freedom, and that is this city of Amsterdam, in which no religious discrimination according to Spinoza existed. Which is a slight overstatement, but at any rate, the experiment of the Dutch, of the Low Countries, became of crucial importance for the fate of freedom in the Western countries. Sir William Petty, in a way the founder of economics, was one of the men who used the Dutch example to show the English that a much higher degree of freedom is possible than was hitherto granted in England.[xii] But also the point to which he alluded here: democracy is the most natural regime, and therefore superior. The freedom of the state of nature is preserved in it to the highest degree. In the state of nature you have the right to determine the means to your comfortable self-preservation: that is the state of nature. And in a democracy you participate in those decisions, whereas in a non-democracy not every man participates in that, and from this point of view democracy is more natural. That is the key argument of Rousseau later on: he seeks an order of society in which everyone shall remain as he was theretofore, i.e., as he was in the state of nature; that's the idea.

Only one last point towards the end of the chapter, of the book, page 265, the last sentence in the long paragraph.

Reader:

> Wherefore, as we have shown in Chapter XVIII, the safest way for a state is to lay down the rule that religion is comprised solely in the exercise of charity and justice, and that the rights of rulers in sacred, no less than in secular matters, should merely have to do with actions—

LS: Merely.

Reader:

> but that every man should think what he likes and say what he thinks.

[xii] William Petty (1623-87) was an English economist, scientist, philosopher, and member of parliament. The idea of "laissez-faire" is often attributed originally to him.

LS: That is what Spinoza is driving at: perfect freedom of speech. Only actions can be forbidden. But we have seen certain qualifications, for example, anarchism. But there is no doubt that he tends towards that perfect freedom, as in indicated by the "action." Now the end.

Reader:

> I have thus fulfilled the task I set myself in this treatise. It remains only to call attention to the fact that I have written nothing which I do not most willingly submit to the examination and approval of my country's rulers; and that I am willing to retract anything which they shall decide to be repugnant to the laws, or prejudicial to the public good. I know that I am a man, and as a man liable to error, but against error I have taken scrupulous care, and have striven to keep in entire accordance with the laws of my country, with loyalty, and with morality. (*TPT*, chap. 20)

LS: Whatever may be the truth, perfect freedom of speech or not, Spinoza makes it very clear that it did not exist in Holland at this time. Can you imagine a writer in the twentieth century, in this country, concluding his book with such a declaration by submitting to the authority of the Supreme Court, for example? The sentence before the last makes it clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that what Spinoza tried to do in the *Treatise* was to establish the unqualified freedom of speech for everyone, and hence in particular also for the philosopher. There is no question. The question concerns only his reasoning. Now the difficulty is this. Compared with all present-day discussion, Spinoza's thought is distinguished from that by the radical distinction he makes throughout between the wise and unwise: the wise, the tiny minority; the unwise, the large majority. And therefore,[53] of course in that sense he was not a democrat in any way, and this naturally creates a difficulty for his argument. Strictly speaking, he can say that the life of virtue is the life of freedom; that is an old story. But this has the great disadvantage that freedom thus understood is possible under almost any regime. Spinoza says under any regime; therefore he must base the right to universal freedom on grounds other than those of virtue or rational freedom. We discern such a principle in his thought which we called either the subrational good or comfortable self-preservation. And that works up to a point, but Spinoza cannot leave it at that.

He is trying to find a formula—well, let me make it simple. Here is the highest good, *summum bonum*. This in itself does not require political freedom. Political freedom is here only a kind of convenience. Then we have the subrational good, comfortable self-preservation for all, which requires democracy; and let us assume also, if the democracy is tolerably rational, a liberal democracy, meaning freedom of speech also for the more sensible people. What Spinoza tries to do is to find a unitary formula which[54] [does] not[55] pin the argument purely on the highest good, nor pin it entirely on this subrational good, but on something which is equally applicable to both, you see, to get a truly universal doctrine. Why does he do that? First of all, there is this interest in a universal doctrine stemming from the theoretical conception altogether. We will see that already at the beginning of the *Political Treatise* where this will come out. The highest good does not necessarily require political freedom. This good, the subrational good, does not have an essential relation to the freedom of the mind. It could perhaps include it among many other things, but it has no essential relation to it. That is unsatisfactory; therefore he is trying to find a

principle which applies equally to the highest human possibility and to the lowest which is defensible, the subrational good, comfortable self-preservation.

As I said, in Kant—it appears most clearly in his *Philosophy of Right*[xiii] much more than in his other writings—there an attempt was made to define the political principle as freedom, and freedom means something which can be exercised equally by all. The freedom of philosophizing in a serious sense cannot be exercised by all. The freedom of comfortable self-preservation can be said to be exercisable by all, but that is much less interesting for those who are interested in the highest good. A doctrine which is equally applicable to all men, without taking into consideration the essential difference, is a very difficult problem, [and] the difficulty will appear more clearly when we turn to the *Political Treatise,* where we will see that Spinoza is trying to find a universal doctrine of man as a political being which is not simply normative but, in the present-day language, behavioral—a doctrine which applies to the conduct, to the actual conduct of all men. And in the *Political Treatise* he makes more visible than in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* the attempt to base a normative political teaching also addressed to all men, on a behavioral teaching allegedly expressing fundamental truths equally true of all men. This aspect of Spinoza's doctrine appears less clearly from the *Theologico-Political Treatise* than from the *Political Treatise,* not because Spinoza changed his mind, in my opinion, but because the purpose of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* was more immediately practical than that of the *Political Treatise*. Absolute freedom of speech was the key problem here, not political theory in general.

Student: The way you formulated the principle of Kant doesn't take into consideration—I would say the principle of Kant presupposes the distinction between the moral sphere and the legal sphere.

LS: Yes, but he founds that. Let me put it this way. It presupposes only this: that everywhere, at least in the more sophisticated societies, a distinction is made between morality and law.

Student: Was that in Spinoza?

LS: No, not in this form. Spinoza did not think so much in legal terms as Kant did. This problem did not play such a role in this form in Spinoza. But still, if you go beneath this bureaucratic problem, if I may say so, to distinguish the moral sphere from the legal sphere, and go to the motives inspiring it, it was a concern with freedom. Because if the supremacy of morality is admitted, the danger of a paternalistic moral despotism is implied.

Student: Only if the moral is embodied in the legal. But if the moral is a principle outside of the legal . . .

LS: Yes, but the older thinkers did not make this distinction.

Student: But Kant did.

[xiii] Presumably Strauss is referring to Kant's *Science of Right* (*Rechtslehre*).

LS: Kant, yes, because he has an interest in avoiding paternal despotism, moral or immoral. You can understand that. Today, when you read the vulgar literature, say, on Plato, what do they say? Well, I don't care that Plato talks all the time of virtue; in effect, this leads to dictatorship, as they say. And whether the dictatorship is introduced in the name of virtue or of a vicious principle is practically of no importance, because the guys who will exercise that dictatorship will in all probability not be the nicest of men—which is a very sound political argument. And therefore let us forget about virtue in a way; let us abstract from the difference between the absolute rule of the virtuous, let us say, and the absolute rule of the vicious, but let us try to find a sphere which is immune to any government, virtuous or vicious, and which by this very fact even compels the government to be tolerably decent as a limitation. Do you see that? That is another description of the same thing I tried before: to find a sphere with which the government cannot interfere in any way, neither in the name of virtue nor in the form of any vicious principle. This freedom, not defined in moral terms, is the most important political consideration, much more important than that of virtue.

Student: But in Kant you could distinguish two vertical lines, the political freedom and the moral freedom. I meant two horizontal lines.

LS: No, as you put it first would be better. In a way, freedom appears in Kant as a kind of moral demand[56] which comes from above.[57] But in the other sense, the more sophisticated sense, you might be right; I don't know whether you mean that.

Student: Because the moral freedom is really independent of political freedom: a man can be morally free by acting in accordance with a universal maxim. But the universal maxim is applicable to all men as men, and it doesn't come from above, but within.

LS: But it does, you see. It comes from above the empirical man.

Student: It comes from above the empirical man, but this simply ensures the moral man's independence from his empirical self, or independence from the political self. That is, in Kant, perhaps as distinguished from Spinoza, a man can be free, can be morally free in any society simply by obeying the rule given to him by reason, the universal maxim. But he need not be a philosopher to be free.

LS: That is true, absolutely. That is crucial. Yes, everyone [can].

Student: So in that it does apply to everyone, there is a horizontal level where all men can be morally free, and this moral freedom is independent of whatever political freedom there is.

LS: Yes, surely there is such a tendency in Kant. But if that were the whole story, his political philosophy would have in a way become unintelligible. Let me state it as follows. What does morality, for Kant, mean? Obey the law of reason. The universalized maxim, the law of reason. Good. But what is an exaggerated but revealing expression of what Kant understands concretely and primarily by morality? I believe I can answer that question; if you want to have my answer: respect for the dignity of every human being. Not that this covers everything. Rightly understood, if you include yourself for your own dignity, it covers everything; but of course the

emphasis is primarily on what you owe to the others. Now if this is so, then as a moral man you must be concerned with the establishment of a society in which the dignity of every human being is respected. The moralism of Kant, by which I mean[58] the assertion that the only thing which ultimately counts is morality and not philosophy, makes him much more political than Spinoza was. Spinoza could ultimately say: The highest good is philosophy, and philosophizing is possible in every regime; therefore I don't have to care particularly. Kant could not.

Kant finds a solution, which is not very satisfactory, by his strict prohibition against revolution.[59] In the first place, Kant teaches that you have a moral duty to be concerned with the establishment of decent societies, societies in which the dignity of everyone is respected. On the other hand, he teaches that revolution is *streng verboten*, strictly forbidden, because every revolution implies lying, conspiracies. Conspiracies mean lying, and since lying is absolutely immoral according to Kant, revolution is not possible for a moral man. Therefore in practice you have to obey your government. Surely if the government commands you to do something immoral you won't do it: this right you have, but you have no right to revolution. But one point which I said is crucial. For Kant it is absolutely necessary that the moral teaching has political consequences, although they cannot be put into effect[60] [unless] you have a moral prince who changes the laws. We have to wait for that. Now how far does this affect your horizontal-vertical?

Student: Then I would ask, where is Spinoza's specifically moral teaching here? There isn't any, obviously. It is all a political teaching.

LS: Well, it all depends. His teaching of the highest good includes a certain moral teaching. Yes?

Student: In the *Ethics* it might be developed, certainly. But right here, in a political treatise, there is strictly no moral teaching. That is, there can be no moral sphere over and above the political or legal sphere.

LS: No. Keep this question in mind until we come to the *Political Treatise*, because in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* this is provided for by the biblical teaching: charity. Charity, which Spinoza does not recognize in the last result, but which is sufficient for his purposes here. This is the moral teaching in contradistinction to any philosophic teaching.

Student: But that is strictly subservient to the political teaching, whereas in Kant, as you demonstrated or showed, the moral teaching implies a concern with the political teaching, the political state, in order to raise it up to the level with the moral.

LS: In Spinoza I believe that could not be more than a recommendation, and not[61] [a duty]. In other words, if it is shown that a given order of society is more beneficial to man than others, a man who is not a vicious fellow would at least wish it and, if feasible, he would work for its establishment. But it would not have this moral power which it has in Kant.

But to come back to this point: the problem which we must keep in mind, I believe, is really[62] this attempt to find a formula for a political society which is lower than that of morality strictly understood, because that leads to a limitation of freedom, and higher than mere pleasure or

comfortable self-preservation. That is, I think, what Spinoza is trying to do and, with entirely different means, Kant also. That we must keep in mind.[63]

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[1] Deleted "perhaps"
[2] Deleted "on"
[3] Deleted "Yes"
[4] Deleted "In a monarchy"
[5] Deleted "that"
[6] Deleted "Now, let us go on"
[7] Deleted "the"
[8] Deleted "how it"
[9] Deleted "So Spinoza"
[10] Deleted "to"
[11] Moved "everyone possesses"
[12] Deleted "if I remember well. Yes, the 16th Chapter"
[13] Deleted "Now let us see – but in the sequel he makes one point."
[14] Deleted "You know"
[15] Deleted "that"
[16] Deleted "doesn't"
[17] Deleted "his"
[18] Deleted "With the principle of comfortable self-preservation"
[19] Moved "especially"
[20] Deleted "that"
[21] Deleted "that"
[22] Deleted "I have stated it sometimes as follows: the real key regarding liberty"
[23] Deleted "it is also that"
[24] Deleted "Yes"
[25] Deleted "the distinction between"
[26] Moved "be"
[27] Deleted "is"
[28] Deleted "so"
[29] Deleted "they"
[30] Deleted "like"
[31] Deleted "the"
[32] Deleted "that"
[33] Deleted "that"
[34] Deleted "that which"
[35] Deleted "of men was"
[36] Deleted "when you are reading"
[37] Deleted "from"
[38] Deleted "they were"
[39] Deleted "clear; although"
[40] Deleted "already by the"
[41] Deleted "in"
[42] Deleted "If each individual would reserve that right"
[43] Deleted "[Reader:] If we hole to the principle that a man's loyalty to the state. [**LS**:] Now let us stop here for a moment."
[44] Deleted "that"
[45] Deleted "that"
[46] Deleted "This science is so"
[47] Deleted "more"
[48] Deleted "Because there"
[49] Deleted "if you take"
[50] Deleted "This is a simple document."

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[51] Deleted "But"
[52] Deleted "But"
[53] Deleted "that"
[54] Deleted "comprises – in other words"
[55] Deleted "to"
[56] Deleted "eventually"
[57] Deleted "What do you mean by that, by the way?"
[58] Deleted "now"
[59] Deleted "That means, in other words, there is no legitimate link between your duty to be concerned with the establishment of decent society and your – let me begin that sentence."
[60] Deleted "except if"
[61] Deleted "duties"
[62] Deleted "that"
[63] Deleted "Well, we will try to continue that. Next time, Mr. __ will read this paper, and then we will have two more papers."

Session 14: no date

Leo Strauss:[1] I believe [that in discussing the *Political Treatise*] it would have been simpler to start from the first chapter [rather than the second, as you did],[i] because what he says in the first chapter does not imply this complicated quasi-theology. The first chapter is, so to speak, immediately intelligible, especially today. The second chapter, this quasi-theology, is really unintelligible today. But that is a minor point. You saw quite a few points which do not meet the eye. For example, that there is a struggle against nature is an element in Spinoza's thinking. You referred at the end to the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*,[ii] and that was perfectly reasonable to do, but did you see any evidence for this notion of a struggle against nature in the [first] three chapters of the *Political Treatise*?[2]

Student: I was thinking in terms of when he refers to self-preservation, the struggle of human beings with each other. This is really only meaningful if you look at it also having to struggle against nature.

LS: But does he speak of that?

Student: He doesn't refer to it explicitly.

LS: Yes he does. But it is not so obvious, and therefore I wanted just to check a bit. Now you stated correctly, self-preservation does not absolutely require the state. Yes? That is what you said. Only comfortable self-preservation.

Student: Yes.

LS: That is also based on an explicit statement. Now you stated very powerfully the amoral or mechanical character of the state as it comes out in Spinoza.[3] [It] is absolutely necessary to bring that out, though it is of course not the last word on Spinoza. In other words, it is this notion which was very clearly stated by Kant later. The ordinary view is that the best society is possible only in a nation of angels. But, Kant says, the best society must be possible in a nation of devils provided they have sense, i.e., provided they are good calculators. Prudent devils can have the best society: no moral conversion is required for making a society perfect. And this you sense rightly also in Spinoza.

Now the Turks bother you very much, and they are surely an excellent example of the problem because the Turkish Empire lasted long and, as you say, everyone was happy or seemed happy. But how would Spinoza argue against this proposition, as I now stated it, restating what you said?

Student: In some sense, the perfection of man.

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[i] Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.
[ii] *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* was an early theoretical work by Spinoza. It is usually attributed to about 1662, though it was not published until Spinoza's death in 1677. It is generally considered to be superseded by the *Ethics* as the final presentation of Spinoza's views.

LS: But we don't always—let us go step by step, and not always look at the highest, because the perfection of man is a complicated problem in Spinoza itself. What does happiness mean? By subliminal influences you can bring men to be satisfied with something which they really don't like, primarily. A man can be made happy with what he originally regarded as a miserable state. So we must have something more than happiness in this subjective sense of mere contentedness.

Student: If he has the capacity to believe himself happy, why must he have more than that?

LS: Why must he . . .

Student: If he is fooled into thinking himself happy . . .

LS: But he has, there is no question.

Student: Why does he need any more than that, then?

LS: Sure, that's the question. In other words, if people can be talked into believing that all miseries which they have in this life are irrelevant compared with obedience to the Sultan, followed by eternal happiness after that—that works. The Sultan has shown it. But what is the objection to that? That it is untrue is a great theoretical objection but not necessarily a practical objection, because the practical problem is of course to make society work, and that works somehow. And even from a military point of view the Turks were for some centuries, as you know, a formidable military power. Yes?

Student: I am just trying to think through what Spinoza answers, and I found some internal conflict in his answer. But the suggestion seems to be that reason demands liberty, not obedience, and that where the state teaches only obedience, where obedience is the only fact and there is no liberty or no freedom,[4] it is basically not in accord with reason.

LS: Yes, but let us take the tough side of Spinoza first. The multitude can't lead a rational life. That doesn't make any difference from this point of view. No, I think the objective criterion as distinguished from the merely subjective happiness, i.e., contentedness, is comfortable self-preservation. If people are ruled by a Sultan, and especially if he has this easy way out to the other life, he will not take care of their massive and solid earthly interests properly—and [that is comfortable self-preservation, which I call the sub-rational good], generally [speaking a] good[5] of which every man is capable. And it would be simply—how shall I say it?—inhuman of a philosopher to boost the power of the Sultan and not help this mass of poor people to get something better of which they are capable.

So we have comfortable self-preservation as the goal of government, but that has nothing to do with freedom. That was the great controversy towards the end of the eighteenth century. Comfortable self-preservation can be achieved by a paternal despot who regards his subjects as his children. Kant, for example—but Kant was not the only one—made exactly this point: that is in a way the most dangerous principle, self-preservation, because the welfare state (to use our present-day term)[6] makes people forget a much higher good, and this higher good is freedom. Freedom is absolutely incompatible with paternal despotism, and that is of course what Spinoza

is driving at. And the question is: What does this freedom mean, and what is its basis? And that we must see. We have already discussed it to some extent last time, and we have to take it up again.

The last point I would make regarding your paper is this.[7] The *Treatise on the Improvement of the Understanding* is a fairly early book of Spinoza. If I remember well its exact date is not known, but it is fairly early, and one cannot take it without further ado as an adequate expression of the thought of the mature Spinoza. It is well known among the people who thought about this kind of thing that[8] [it] was written under the influence of Bacon in particular, and the Baconian notion of technological progress is of course there very powerful, more powerful than in the other writings of Spinoza. So one must be careful [9][in ascribing] to Spinoza's final thought these points, although they are surely illuminating [in showing] that Spinoza, who was generally speaking not such a massively modern thinker as Bacon was,[10] underwent his influence, at least for some period. Yes?

Student: I felt I had to look elsewhere. He leaves a great deal unsupported.

LS: Sure, but on the other hand—I praise you for thinking of this crucial problem all the time—but one could also say that in the first three chapters of the *Political Treatise,* which were your assignment, this problem does not yet arise, the problem of democracy.

Student: It has to arise.

LS: It was perfectly wise of you to think of that, yes. Now in the *Political Treatise* he refers to the *Theologico-Political Treatise* and to the *Ethics*, so the natural book to look up in order to get the supplementation which you do not find in the *Political Treatise* would be the *Ethics*. But still it was good that we have been reminded of this technological period, if I may say so, in Spinoza's thought, if it was not more.

You referred to the title of the *Political Treatise*. I am sure that the title as we have it now is not by Spinoza.[11] [It] was an incomplete book published after his death, and[12] [his] editors[13] printed a letter of Spinoza to some acquaintances about this. Now in this letter the work is called *Political Treatise*, so that is clearly Spinoza's title. But the long subtitle was made by the editors with a view to the fragment they found, and this fragment contains only the beginning of the discussion of democracy, not the discussion of democracy, therefore the subtitle is about democracy. Spinoza died before he completed it. That is the whole story about that.

Now then let us turn to the *Political Treatise*, and first to chapter 1. This time we will have it easier because the treatise is subdivided into paragraphs, and therefore we don't have to refer to the pages. By the way, the titles of these chapters are not by Spinoza. They are made by later editors, not by the original editor. Spinoza begins the book by a rather violent attack on the philosophers: not *some*, but *the* philosophers. What's wrong with them? They moralize. They presuppose a utopian standard. The word utopian is proper because, Spinoza says, they think of a nature which is nowhere, a human nature which is nowhere. And utopia means nowhere, nowhere-land. They do not take men as they are. No philosophic politics is in existence which is of any use—a statement repeated every year in a book or pamphlet up to the present day. You

know this so-called scientific political science, they say this all the time. They prepare it. We don't have it yet. The statement is a repetition in a more violent language of what Machiavelli had said in the fifteenth chapter of the *Prince*. But so, Machiavelli was in existence. What does Spinoza answer to that?[14]

Student: Machiavelli is a statesman.

LS: And not a philosopher. That's the point, sure. The politicians—and here we have to think especially of Machiavelli—they are much to be preferred to philosophers. They take vice as coeval with man. They do not believe that there is a condition possible in which virtue would reign [15][as sovereign]. But they also take vice as something which must somehow be controlled. They follow experience by the method of trial and error: which methods of controlling vice work, and which don't work. They saw that states cannot be ruled in accordance with the rules of private piety. Machiavelli, quoting Cosimo de Medici: "States cannot be ruled with paternosters in one's hand."[iii] As a private man you can live accordingly, but not as a statesman; and statesman means of course not merely the actual statesmen. The politicians, *politici*, mean the political writers also, and Machiavelli is the most natural man to think of here. Now let us read the third paragraph.

Reader:

> 3. And, certainly, I am fully persuaded that experience has revealed all conceivable sorts of commonwealth, which are consistent with men's living in unity, and likewise the means by which the multitude may be guided or kept within fixed bounds. So that I do not believe that we can by meditation discover in this matter anything not yet tried and ascertained, which shall be consistent with experience or practice. For men are so situated, that they cannot live without some general law. But general laws and public affairs are ordained and managed by men of the utmost acuteness, or, if you like, of great cunning or craft. And so it is hardly credible, that we should be able to conceive of anything serviceable to a general society, that occasion or chance has not offered, or that men, intent upon their common affairs, and seeking their own safety, have not seen for themselves.

LS: You see, what Spinoza says[16] [is that] the experience of political devices is complete. We cannot think out anything which experience has not already produced. And Spinoza does not refer to future experience—you know, progress or whatever you might call it. Experience is complete. Let us take this very seriously. There is a statement of Aristotle in the *Politics* against Plato which almost reads like that, but Aristotle is much more open to future improvements than Spinoza is. Aristotle doesn't say any more than that particular institutions have all been invented already—say, private property, of this type, of that type. The basic forms are all invented, but they have not always been properly put together. Therefore there is room for theory, for a more intelligent putting together of already existing inventions. Spinoza does not make this qualification, and that is very remarkable. We can put it as follows. From this statement (let us see whether that has to be modified later), there is no such thing as a political ideal, if an ideal is a construct, a notion which is not necessarily yet actualized. In this point there is the greatest contrast between Spinoza and Hobbes, because Hobbes was also one of these tough boys, as you

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[iii] Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 7.6

know. But Hobbes compared his *Leviathan* to Plato's *Republic*, as remote from practice as it existed hitherto in Plato's *Republic*. I forget now the chapter in the *Leviathan*. It is at the end of a chapter, chapter 31 or so. Well, you can easily find it.[iv] In other words, Hobbes, just as Rousseau and implicitly also Locke, took it for granted that the primary task of political science or political philosophy is to describe the correct order. The correct order. Whether the correct order exists or does not exist is a secondary matter, most certainly a secondary matter. Why? You cannot diagnose any given political order as correct if you do not know in advance what the correct order is. You cannot abstract simply the correct order from any existing order. Spinoza deviates from that very radically, at least in this formulation, and we must see what this means. But in all these points, as will become clear, and as you saw in your paper,[v] Spinoza anticipates behavioral social science, which as you know is also emphatically concerned with the understanding of the actual, and no monkey business. Well, they are of course very inconsistent because they are not tough boys really; they talk all the time of values.

Student: Was there a state in existence such as the liberal democracy which Spinoza has in mind?

LS: That is a very hard question. Spinoza must have believed, otherwise that statement doesn't make sense, that liberal states existed in the past, to some extent—well, he would say it existed in Amsterdam (you remember that passage we read last time), which is of course some considerable exaggeration. I think we will come to that question. But it is a very necessary question. Now let us read the next paragraph, [page 288].

Reader:

> 4. Therefore, on applying my mind to politics, I have resolved to demonstrate by a certain and undoubted course of argument—

LS: "By certain and indubitable reason." Why not reason?

Reader:

> or to deduce from the very condition of human nature, not what is new and unheard of, but only such things as agree best with practice. And that I might investigate the subject-matter of this science with the same freedom of spirit as we generally use in mathematics, I have laboured carefully, not to mock, lament, or execrate, but to understand human actions; and to this end I have looked upon passions, such as love, hatred, anger, envy, ambition, pity, and the other perturbations of the mind, not in the light of vices of human nature, but as properties, just as pertinent to it, as are heat, cold, storm, thunder, and the like to the nature of the atmosphere, which phenomena, though inconvenient, are yet necessary, and have fixed causes, by means of which we endeavour to understand their nature, and the mind has just as much pleasure in viewing them aright, as in knowing such things as flatter the senses.

[iv] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 31, sec. 41.

[v] The student who read a paper at the beginning of the session.

LS: Yes. That is an amazing statement. To repeat, Spinoza despises the philosophers and respects the politicians, i.e., Machiavelli. But he is not a politician in this sense. He is a philosopher. What then does the philosopher do? Answer: the philosopher will demonstrate or deduce from the condition of human nature what the politicians have found by trial and error. This truth, the understanding, the deduction to universal laws of what is already known, that is the philosophic or scientific task. The characteristic of this method (and I think that is a very original statement) is no judgment, no moral judgment. To understand, not to laugh, or to detest, or to deplore. Why? Because the passions—that means of course also the vices—are necessary, and therefore they are ultimately as little blamable as a thunderstorm. We don't like to be hit by lightning, surely not; but who would say that lightning is vicious? Ultimately men are not vicious. They behave in the way in which they behave necessarily. Since this is so, the passions and the vices, since they are the objects of a theoretical study like the study of mathematical objects,[17] are also the objects of contemplative pleasure. You look at a passionate, vicious human being, if you have reached the highest stage, with the same detachment as you look at a cylinder or any mathematical thing. You see, the statesman acts differently: the statesman tries to control these things. That is implied. He controls it. But the philosopher looks at it with perfect detachment. He sees here the vicious fellow, and he sees there the statesman, and he sees the interaction of both. He understands both. But he doesn't take sides.

That is an amazing statement. I don't believe you will find anything of this kind later on. But in modern times this has had a terrific success. How much of the modern novel—I am speaking now of the highest modern novel—is not implied in that, the pleasure derived from the contemplation of human vice? I am not speaking now of these low things, but for example when you have such a marvelous analysis of a vicious human being as in Balzac's *Cousin Bette*[18]—a spinster; you know[19] spinsters are said to be particularly given to resentment, and here that is shown in the most extreme form, with perfect plausibility, by the way; it is not a fantastic story at all. And one can't help following Balzac to admire this power of nature effective in that resentment. I believe the theory of that is implied in this remark of Spinoza. I don't say that this is what Balzac intended for his whole work; I am sure it is wrong to say that. To what extent it is underlying earlier poetic presentation of vice and passion is a very long question, but surely philosophers never stated that in this way. So we note then a remarkable coexistence of a purely theoretical interest with a practical interest, because Spinoza also shares with the practitioner the interest in the control of vice.

Student: Could you say a word how this differs from, say the Stoic attitude or . . .

LS: The Stoics did nothing but give recipes. I mean, read, say, Seneca's long disquisition on anger: that is not simply a presentation of an angry man. It shows you why anger is such a disgraceful thing and such a foolish thing, and he gives you *n* arguments for that. Now when you read Spinoza's *Ethics*, books 4 and 5, especially book 4, he also gives an equation of the control of the passions. He also gives you recipes, but there is a subtle difference between Spinoza's recipes and the traditional moralistic treatment. Say, ninety percent of the recipes are the same; but ten percent are different. For Spinoza the real liberation from the passions does not consist in becoming aware of the indignity of the passions. There is no appeal—the appeal to the higher is subordinate. The liberation comes from analysis of the passions, by making clear to yourself[20] [why it is] that you are angry now. Some psychoanalysts have said, not entirely unjustly, that

what psychoanalysis means has been prepared by Spinoza's thought, and that is not altogether wrong. And that is the only element of Spinoza's *Ethics*, of the practical application at any rate, as far as I can see, which does not go back to the so-called sources. I cannot now develop this further. I have forgotten many details. But here it is clear. No, [for] the Stoics[21], or Aristotle for that matter[22]—for all the ancient moralists [the passions are] something which by their nature call for control. A mere looking at it as a phenomenon not pointing beyond itself would be an unrealistic understanding—if, [for example], you look at anger or envy or hatred, and you cannot look at it without seeing what it does to the human being. And therefore the value judgment is inherent in the description; therefore there is no difference between theory and practice there. For Spinoza this difference exists. Yes?

Student: In this examination of human nature, is he referring to the multitudes? Or statesmen, philosophers?

LS: We haven't yet heard anything of that. We have heard up to now only what the right procedure, or the meaning of philosophy is. The distinction between wise and vulgar has not yet emerged. I repeat: the political philosopher gives the reasons, the ultimate reasons, why the recipes of the practitioners like Machiavelli are sound. That is one thing. And[23] he cannot do that without looking at the passions which the politicians control, try to control. Looking at the passions, however, becomes in a way an end in itself, because passions are natural phenomena and their study is an object of contemplative pleasure. Spinoza goes on to describe what we may call the anti-social passions and their power and to make clear the inefficacy of the teaching of religion, i.e., of the teaching that one should love one's neighbor like oneself, or that one should, as Spinoza identifies it here, defend the rights of[24] others as one would defend one's own right. But not only the teaching of religion is ineffective, but the teaching of reason too. What reason teaches as to the way in which the passions can be controlled, say, what Cicero or Seneca teach and such people, is ineffective. Politics cannot be built on either the philosophic or the theologic teaching regarding the control of the passions.[25] Spinoza says these things are very good when a man is on the point of dying (then he repents, surely, all sins) or in temples or churches where men don't exercise any commerce, but least of all in the marketplace or in a court where it would be most necessary.

Now what is to be done, since the teaching of reason or religion has no influence? Well, the old story: institutions with teeth in them. That is the only thing which can help. Not the spirit in which men do the things which should be done, but the fact of proper administration itself. Whether they do it out of calculation, out of fear of gallows, or out of the public spirit is utterly irrelevant. The only things which count are the institutions which compel men to do the necessary thing. The virtue of government, as it is made clear here in the sixth paragraph, is radically different from private virtue. We may say the virtue of government is that virtue by which unwise men can rule unwise men. Private virtue would be the virtue of the wise man. Philosophers will never rule, so let us be realistic. That is exactly what Spinoza means. Politics must be based on what is common to all men. The teaching of reason is in fact applicable only to the reasonable men, a tiny minority. And we see the implication: a natural law in the traditional sense, i.e., the moral law, would be absolutely hopeless because men don't[26] [follow] it. Reason doesn't have that power. We have to find a natural law, but of a new type, a natural law which men cannot transgress. Natural law in the traditional sense was of course a law which men can

transgress. Think of the prohibition against murder. It is transgressed every day, as you see from the newspapers if you don't see it more directly. But what Spinoza is seeking is a realistic natural law, a natural law which no one can transgress. Politics, in other words, must be a universal science, equally applicable to all men. The universal laws which it seeks are not the universal laws of *ought*, but the universal laws of behavior, to use the present-day fashionable term. And if we know how all men are by nature compelled to behave, then we can see how to channel that with a view a) to the possibility of society in general, and b) of a good society. Now what a good society is we of course don't know yet; we have not even raised the question. But the problem is clear in general terms. Yes?

Student: This means in effect the philosophers become statesmen, rather than statesmen being philosophers?

LS: Yes, you can put it this way, but then you forget one thing: the contemplative pleasure. You must not forget, Spinoza was very much concerned with that. That would always distinguish him from the mere practitioner, however clever.

Now let us turn to the second chapter. That is[27] a parallel to the sixteenth chapter of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* where Spinoza deduces his whole notion of natural rights from the equation: God's intellect and his will are identical. I discussed this when we spoke of that. Now it is interesting that in the *Political Treatise* Spinoza does not refer to this equation; he refers only to God's power. Everything which is owes its being to God's power. Everyone granted it—at least no one dared to question it at the time[28] in public. Therefore Spinoza argues on that premise and tries to show that if everything owes its being to God's power, then it is sacred by this very fact. God created it, to use theological language. And of course that is true not only of the nice things, but of the base things as well; therefore the vices and passions are as much consecrated by God as the virtues. That means, in plain English, there is no divinely originated natural law as a moral law. The right of nature is in fact a law which cannot be transgressed. As he puts it in paragraph 4, "by the rights of nature understand the various laws or rules or nature in accordance with which everything takes place, i.e., the very power of nature." Read the sequel of that, Mr. ____.

Reader:

> 4. And so by natural right I understand the very laws or rules of nature, in accordance with which everything takes place, in other words, the power of nature itself. And so the natural right of universal nature, and consequently of every individual thing, extends as far as its power: and accordingly, whatever any man does after the laws of his nature, he does by the highest natural right, and he has as much right over nature as he has power.

LS: More literally—how do you say it in English: "right to," [as] when you say "right to" a house?

Student: Yes.

LS: Well, in Latin that is *ius in*. Spinoza says here everyone has so much right "to nature," *in naturam*. That phrase is repeated later on. That is what justifies your disquisition in your paper.[vi] Spinoza conceives in a way[29] of man's position towards nature: not only that he is a part of nature, as he says all the time, but also of a conquest of nature. Man has a right to nature, against nature, over nature.

Now this is already implied, as Spinoza makes clear in the following paragraph, that since every man has a right to whatever is necessary in him, the passions have as much natural right as reason.[30] That doesn't need any further proof, given the premise. In other words, if you behave most irrationally, you are compelled to do so by your nature and by the environment, it doesn't make any difference. You know, the broken home; therefore[31] it cannot be criticized from any point of view. Yes?

Student: Precisely because of that, how can he say we have a right to nature? He can say we can do that which it is possible for us to do—our nature can do anything it is possible for it to do—but he introduces the concept of right, which really doesn't belong, and from that he is able to derive things which really don't follow.

LS: Well, on the basis of an argument which is very dubious, he identifies right and might, yes? Would it make sense to you to say that each of us has some might against nature?

Student: Yes.

LS: All right, since might is right . . .

Student: Yes, but I don't see where he gets the whole concept of right.

LS: Spinoza could have stated his doctrine without this theological garb and simply have said, as he does say: Right and wrong are human inventions. How is that? And therefore it doesn't make any sense to speak of right as far as we deal with man as man, psychologically. He could have said that. But in order to make [the transition from the traditional notion] a bit easier,[32] he says there is a natural right, but this natural right is identical with the natural might.

Student: But it culminates in the position that the state has the right to do that which it has no might to do. But all he can legitimately say is that the state has the might to do all that it has the might to do, which would be a redundant and meaningless statement.

LS But it is of course not quite so, because apart from this pedagogic purpose that he wants to lead people a bit slowly from the traditional theological view to his view, it has this more important reason. Whenever you speak politically of political phenomena, you can't help speaking of right and wrong. That comes up immediately in every political discussion. Therefore the assertion [that] the state's power is complete, the state is omnipotent or omnicompetent legally has practical good sense. You have no legal redress against an action of the state. Let us simplify matters. You have no legal redress against that, and in reason you cannot wish to have legal redress against that because otherwise you would have to have a superstate which

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[vi] Presumably to the student who read a paper at the beginning of the session.

controls—to which you appeal over the head of your state. Now that is a politically necessary statement, given the premise of Spinoza.[33] Spinoza says here, that is so: from a certain point on, legal arguments stop. If you have some controversy about a plot of land, that's easy, go before a court of law. But how high up? Like this farmer in Michigan, with his chicken farm or whatever it was, has no legal redress. He can emigrate to Australia, that's all he can do. Yes?

Student: Yes.

LS: Spinoza says then: Look, that is all very well. This legal omnipotence and omnicompetence of the state is only part of the story, because the state must also have the power to make it stick. Therefore I give you my mystical formula, my enigmatic formula: Right is might. Right differs from might in all subpolitical matters, if I may say so—I mean, relations of individuals and so on, and non-political groups. In the political matters they coincide, either domestically or in foreign affairs. It is not a senseless statement.

Student: Not at all. It's just that he precludes a form of critique or a form of analysis which begins with: Yes, when we speak of political matters we immediately think of right and wrong, and since we cannot derive right from nature, because as you say, nature is merely a question of might, therefore we must look for right somewhere else.

LS: Oh, that is not too difficult. You start with a perfectly—you say there is no right and wrong. But men have all kinds of passions and so on, and some reason by nature. But they must live in society; that is practically inevitable. And a society cannot exist without something like laws, and without habitual obedience to the laws. If the laws are only on the statute books, it doesn't mean anything, yes? Those are trivial and elementary facts. Now whenever you have a law, you have this alternative: compliance with the law, [i.e.], obedience, or disobedience. The compliance is called justice, the disobedience is called injustice. That is it. That is not sufficient; I am on record for being of that opinion, but still that is a very common view up to the present day, as you know. But still I would say Spinoza's point, disregarding all pedagogic contrivances and so, the crucial point which he wants to make is only this, and that is not unimportant: that legal considerations ultimately lead to the translegal considerations, and therefore there the distinction between right and might, which is characteristic of the whole legal sphere, is inapplicable. That is the point which he wants to make. In the complicated modern constitutional liberal democracy that is not so visible because everything is regulated somehow by law—you know, Congress, elections, what have you. But[34] nevertheless at one point or the other it shows, if only theoretically, in the first words of the Preamble of the Constitution. After all, all rights which exist in this country depend ultimately on the Constitution. And on what does the Constitution depend? Either on natural right, that's clear—but that is not the preferred opinion in social science. Hence on what? As the Constitution says: "We the people." The sovereignty of the people. That is this old thought, there must ultimately be a sovereign who as the creator of all law cannot be bound by the law.

Modern man has found this shrewd device of making a distinction (that was very early, sixteenth-seventeenth century) between the fundamental laws and the non-fundamental laws, so that in the older constitutional doctrines the sovereign can change all non-fundamental laws but not the fundamental laws. For example, in an absolute monarchy he cannot affect the descent;

primogeniture is the fundamental law. Or he cannot alienate the royal domain, and similar things of this kind. But that was not sufficient, for example, in England, where there was a lot of interference with royal succession, as you know. And it is not theoretically satisfactory, because what is the essence of a fundamental law? You can leave it at a merely positive historical statement, but that is ultimately not satisfactory. Therefore the notion was developed, first by Bodin[vii] and then more clearly by Hobbes, that there must be in every society a creator of all laws who as such cannot be subject to any laws. In any non-monarchy this maker of the law must have procedures for making laws. In a monarchy that is not necessary; the king just[35] [speaks]—although they had to make a distinction between what a king says when drunk and what the king says when sober. You know, the royal seal made it a law, not the mere oral pronouncement when he came drunk from the bedroom of his mistress.[36] People saw that wouldn't work and said: No, he must be sober and in a sober mind put his signature with his seal. In a non-monarchy, because there is always more than one man, you must have procedural rules. For example, the majority of the highest council must decide. Or in the month of January, number one, in the month of February, number two—which are all laws. But these procedural rules regarding the lawmaking are radically different from the substantive laws.

In the sequel, paragraph 6, Spinoza states the premise or consequence: there is no freedom of the will. And therefore Adam's fall, if we accept the biblical story, was not disobedience, which should have been avoided, but was necessary. And as for the Devil, well, Spinoza says: The Devil as an intelligent being couldn't have done that, couldn't have been so foolish as to rebel against God. I will try to state what Spinoza has in mind simply as follows. Spinoza says that all commandments, all moral law—thou shalt not kill, for example—imply the command: Be sensible. For example, Thou shalt not kill: what distinguishes innocent killings from murder? A fool could say, when he is attacked by a gangster: I can't defend myself because it was said "Thou shalt not kill." So every commandment, even this seemingly simple commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," implies the commandment: Be sensible. That is in practical terms what this criticism means. Freedom cannot be freedom of will in the traditional sense: freedom is virtue, perfection, reasonableness, self-determination. That he develops in paragraph 7.

But this kind of freedom is not only compulsory, strict necessity, but requires it.[viii] If the sensible man acts sensibly he necessarily acts sensibly. His sense does not permit him to act nonsensically. If the fool acts foolishly, he does not do so because he chooses to be a fool, but because he cannot help being a fool. In other words, what Spinoza is trying to do is[37] [distinguish from] freedom in the vulgar sense, freedom of will, *libertas indifferentiae*, the liberty of indifference—you can choose the good, you can choose the bad. It is only your own responsibility or fault whichever you choose. Since this doesn't exist, he says, and the word freedom has some meaning, the only meaning it has is reasonableness, perfection, virtue, self-determination. The self-determination is as necessary as the other-determination of the fools. How does Riesman call these people?[ix] Other-directed. The other-directed are as necessarily other-directed as the self-directed; the necessity is the same. But only the one is directed by

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[vii] See the discussion of Bodin in the second session.

[viii] The *it* in Strauss's sentence is ambiguous but would appear to refer to the "virtue, perfection, reasonableness, self-determination" mentioned at the end of the previous paragraph.

[ix] David Riesman (1909-2002), a sociologist best known for his work, with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd* (1950).

himself. He has an independence, a freedom, which the other lacks. But, and that is the crucial point in paragraph 8, [regarding] this freedom which is true[38]—these free men cannot supply a universal rule, a rule applicable to all men.

In paragraph 8, if you will look at that, in the second sentence. Do you have it? [Page 294.]

Reader:

> From which it follows that the law and ordinance of nature, under which all men are born, and for the most part live, forbids nothing but what no one wishes or is able to do, and is not opposed to strifes, hatred, anger, treachery, or, in general, anything that appetite suggests. (PT 2. 8)

LS: Let us stop here. So in other words, you see here also this interesting point. All men are born as non-rational beings, as not actually rational beings. Most men never become actually rational human beings. Here is the difficulty. The human race is split (this is a simple implication but a legitimate implication) into two groups, the rational and the irrational. How can you get any universally applicable rule? If you get one for the fools, it is inapplicable to the wise, and vice versa. Or do we find perhaps a stratum which is literally common to all? Well, that there is such a stratum in some respects, Spinoza has said, but whether we find it always relevant, that is the question. To repeat, the question is: Are there any rules of conduct which apply equally to the wise and the non-wise, which are neutral to this difference? This is what Spinoza is seeking. The law of reason is radically different from the law of irrational appetite, but the law of reason is not applicable to the majority of men. What Spinoza must then try to do in order to succeed is to abstract from this fundamental distinction. He does it generally speaking in the following way. He gives the edge to what the majority of men do. The majority are irrational; therefore he gets a realistic politics. Politics has always to do with the many. Kings belong to the many, naturally,[39] [though] that is no longer true universally.

The most simple illustration of what I have in mind is Hobbes. Hobbes also wanted to have a universally valid mathematical doctrine. He believed he found the foundation in the fear which every man has of violent death, and this means that this is an absolute rock bottom. All men always fear violent [death] more than anything else, an empirically preposterous assertion.[40] It has a certain element of truth, if stated [this way]: If you act on the principle that any human being will fear violent death as the greatest evil, you will be right most of the time, and you are sensible. That is a rule of thumb. But the moment that you make it a universally valid rule you are wrong, and the proof that it is sound as a rule of thumb can easily be given. What is generally regarded as the greatest punishment? Capital punishment. [41]The legislators in their crude practical wisdom know that to be sent to the gas chamber is generally more feared than to be sent to the penitentiary for ten or twenty years. That in some cases that doesn't work is all right, but generally speaking, law has to do with these averages. But what these exact scientists try to do was to get universally valid rules, and that is the great difficulty. One of you wanted to say something. Mr. ____?

Student: I wish you would make clearer the argument in paragraph 7 where he establishes that virtue is liberty.

LS: I don't believe that one can say, as far as I remember, more than what I said. Such a thing as freedom somehow exists, but it cannot be what the tradition, the theological tradition especially—[and] even Aristotle—said it is: freedom of choice in that sense, freedom of indifference. What then is it? The word "free man" was used in contradistinction to a slave in the first place, but became then sublimated and then it meant a man who deserves to be free as distinguished from a man who deserves to be a slave. And what is a man who is free? Answer: for example, a man who can control his passions, in whom reason is in control. A reasonable man. And Spinoza doesn't deny that there is a possibility of reasonable men, and therefore he says the only serious meaning of freedom is rationality[42]—and in this sense very few people are free, whereas according to the traditional notion every man is free. That is complicated by the doctrine of original sin, but fundamentally every man is free. Yes?

Student: You mean the original Christian notion?

LS: For example, take Thomas Aquinas. He would say this freedom is practically impaired, limited by original sin, but not completely destroyed. And even if you take the severe doctrine, say, of Calvin or Luther, that it has been completely destroyed by original sin, it implies that it originally existed but was lost, so that we are only the heirs to an original misuse of liberty. Without it, the doctrine of original sin doesn't make sense. Otherwise it wouldn't be an original sin, it would be a mere imposition.

Student: Would I be correct in saying that Aristotle and Plato held that only the few were capable of freedom in this sense?

LS: Plato and Aristotle are more "deterministic" than seems at first glance, but they would not take this simplistic view. Let us state it pragmatically,[43] which has good use. It is of the essence of man to have a latitude, which the other beings do not possess. And this latitude, obviously, man can invent. Now there is a connection between this latitude and the moral responsibility which is implied in every moral or legal judgment. You say, you could have acted differently—[x]

—and the deterministic doctrines, if they are sophisticated, like Spinoza's and Hobbes's, do make allowance for that. I do not deny that. They must make allowance for that and show it in such a complicated way that it is not so convincing as the more commonsensical attitude of Plato and Aristotle.

Student: When he identifies reason and self-preservation of man with virtue doesn't he set up a standard?

LS: Sure. But up to now we don't know yet. Up to now he makes only a presupposition which has a certain commonsense plausibility but which is not truly established, that there is such a thing as virtue, rationality, self-determination. We all think somehow it is better to be a rational human being than an irrational human being, but he has not made any attempt here to prove that.

Student: He asserts it.

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[x] There was a break in the tape at this point.

LS: Yes. We all make and legitimately make many assertions which we do not always prove. Although Spinoza could say, with some right: I treat that in the *Ethics*—in which, according to his claim, he had proven it. It is not so difficult to understand, very loosely speaking. Assume a man desires to live pleasantly. The old Epicurean argument that if you are sensible, that is a better way towards a pleasant life than if you behave like an idiot all the time; that's not so complicated. But let us postpone that, please, because we have to go on. Otherwise we will not finish.

In paragraph 14 he makes the assertion that men are by nature enemies. Every man is by nature the enemy of every other man. Hobbes's old story. But at the end of paragraph 15 he says nevertheless [man] is a social animal, as the scholastics put it. Is this not a flat contradiction? No, because he changes the scholastic statement, or the Aristotelian statement. The Aristotelian statement was man is by nature social; and that Spinoza denies: by nature man is anti-social, by nature man is the enemy of every other man. But he gets into trouble because of that; therefore he establishes society, and since it is so necessary for him to do so, one can say man is a social animal.

In paragraph 15, by the way, it becomes clear in Latin, *vix*, "hardly."[xi] The need for society is not universal, as Mr. ____ mentioned. Now every right in society (in paragraph 16) is a social right. The natural right of each is completely absorbed by society. This contains a deviation from Hobbes. Hobbes had maintained that the fundamental right to self-preservation cannot be absorbed by society. [For Spinoza] there cannot be a natural law in the traditional sense, a moral law, because there is no addressee for it. The large majority of men cannot possibly obey it; therefore the natural law can only be a law which cannot be transgressed. Another objection to the traditional notion of natural law is in paragraph 20: Rationality is not obedience. If you conceive of morality as complying with the natural law, i.e., the moral law, you imply rationality is obedience. Spinoza says rationality is freedom, i.e., not obedience. That's the meaning of that.

Paragraph 21 is especially important for the whole argument of the book. These irrational men need society, otherwise they cannot survive for all practical purposes. The multitude must be united, and it can only be united by establishing a sovereign in its midst. The multitude, he says here, cannot be united but in what is reasonable, or rather in what is reasonably right. That would seem to be the solution to all our problems, namely, a perfect harmony between reason and society in spite of the unbridgeable gulf between the reasonable few and the unreasonable many. However unreasonable the many may be, they must live in society, and society is not possible except in what is reasonable. But here he makes already a qualification: this union of the multitude is reasonably right only in the best form of government. We must see, when he comes to the chapter on the best government, how he will justify that. In other words, the question raised by Rabbi ____: What is the standard? The multitude, he says in the next paragraph, cannot be united unless it intends what sound reason teaches to be useful to all men. Now what can he possibly mean by that? The multitude is compelled by reasons accessible even to[44] most foolish men. They are compelled to live in society, and therefore they have an interest also in the permanence of that society. But a society cannot last if its affairs are not conducted with a

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[xi] "To this must be added, that without mutual help men can *hardly* support life and cultivate the mind" (PT 2.15).

tolerable degree of rationality, and therefore there is where reason comes in. But again the Turks—that lasted very long without this reason.

Now a few words about chapter 3. In paragraph 3 [he says that] in civil society, the natural right of each persists. The natural right means in Spinoza the right to everything, to every folly, stupidity, and crime, but it is channeled in such way as to coincide with an unqualified obedience to the will of the state or of society. Such subjection to the will of the state is most rational even if that will is irrational. We have seen this already in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. That is an intelligible statement: if anarchy is the greatest of all evils, obedience to the most foolish command of the most foolish government is a lesser evil, and in this sense rational. But that's too little to satisfy our requirements of rationality.

He gives then two different reasons in order to show a kind of necessary coincidence of state and reason in paragraphs 7 and 8. The most powerful state is the most rational state. Now every state has a self-interest in being the most powerful, and if it cannot become powerful but by becoming rational, if there is such a tremendous premium on rationality, all states will rush to become rational. That's too beautiful to be true, I guess, because[45] the essential limitation of the power of the state is set by human nature. The old story. The state cannot forbid a child to hate his father, or a man to hate his benefactor, and so on. Yet, as we know already, this is not universally valid. The subliminal,[46] it is only generally valid. One can very well raise the question: Is it even always generally valid? Given a certain set-up, even that might not be true. Paragraph 10, which we should read.

Reader:

> For it may be objected to us, Do not the civil state, and the obedience of subjects, such as we have shown is required in the civil state, do away with religion, whereby we are bound to worship God? But if we consider the matter, as it really is, we shall find nothing that can suggest a scruple. For the mind, so far as it makes use of reason, is dependent, not on the supreme authorities, but on itself (Chap. II Sec. 11). And so the true knowledge and the love of God cannot be subject to the dominion of any, nor yet can charity towards one's neighbour (Sec. 8). And if we further reflect, that the highest exercise of charity is that which aims at keeping peace and joining in unity, we shall not doubt that he does his duty, who helps everyone, so far as the commonwealth's laws, that is so far as unity and quiet allow. As for external rites, it is certain, that they can do no good or harm at all in respect of the true knowledge of God, and the love which necessarily results from it; and so they ought not to be held of such importance, and that it should be thought worthwhile on their account to disturb public peace and quiet. (*PT* 3. 10)

LS: This argument is the old story which we have seen in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. The apparently atrocious demand that the civil sovereign is also absolutely sovereign regarding religion is not atrocious at all, because the substance of religion is the inner knowledge of God, and that cannot be touched by the state. The external worship is not so important as to induce any sensible man to bring about civil discord, which is obviously the most uncharitable thing that a

man can do. You remember that. That only proves that Spinoza was not very much concerned with religion. But go on.

Reader:

> Moreover it is certain, that I am not a champion of religion by the law of nature, that is (Chap. II. Sec. 3), by the divine decree.

LS: In other words, only bishops. You remember that story.[xii]

Reader:

> For I have no authority, as once the disciples of Christ had, to cast out unclean spirits and work miracles; which authority is yet so necessary to the propagating of religion in places where it is forbidden, that without it one not only, as they say, wastes one's time and trouble, but causes besides very many inconveniences, whereof all ages have seen most mournful examples.[47]

LS: That has also another implication, because the true religion is the intellectual love of God, as you call it. That is to say, true wisdom, true philosophy, that is possible everywhere. You remember that. We read this in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. Therefore what necessity is there from the point of view of the highest good to demand freedom? This is the great question. And only one last point in paragraph 18, the last paragraph of this chapter.

Reader:

> But that I may not have so often to break the thread of my discourse, and to resolve hereafter similar objections, I would have it known that all this demonstration of mine proceeds from the necessity of human nature, considered in what light you will—I mean, from the universal effort of all men after self-preservation, an effort inherent in all men, whether learned or unlearned. And therefore, however one considers men are led, whether by passion or by reason, it will be the same thing; for the demonstration, as we have said, is of universal application.

LS: That is very important: a universal doctrine; and a universal doctrine, that is not a difficult matter if men are equal in the decisive respect. For example, if you would say the one thing needful is the good will—morality, as Kant said—and by definition all men are capable of that, you can have a universal rule. But if the one thing needful is the contemplative life, which is essentially limited to a few, how can you find a universal rule? Or to simplify matters,[48] look for the lowest common denominator which is politically relevant, say, self-preservation, mere self-preservation. That is common to all men according to Hobbes and therefore he can get some rules of universality, at least at first sight; at closer inspection they prove to be non-universal. But in Spinoza that is endangered because of the fundamental distinction between the fools and the wise. Therefore, he says, we go back to a universal endeavor common to all men, namely, the endeavor to preserve oneself. What Spinoza has in mind is this: Sure, all men want to preserve life in the simple sense of the word, but is this clear and concrete enough to give a meaningful formula for politics? That is the question. And I will show you only one passage, if we turn back

[xii] See session 11.

to paragraph 8 for a moment, the second half of this paragraph where he says: "And I speak here explicitly of those things from which the human nature mostly recoils."

Reader:

> And to this head must likewise be referred such things as are so abhorrent to human nature, that it regards them as actually worse than any evil, as that a man should be witness against himself, or torture himself, or kill his parents, or not strive to avoid death, and the like, to which no one can be induced by rewards or threats. But if we still choose to say, that the commonwealth has the right or authority to order such things, we can conceive of it in no other sense, than that in which one might say, that a man has the right to be mad or delirious. For what but a delirious fancy would such a right be, as could bind no one? And here I am speaking expressly of such things as cannot be subject to the right of a commonwealth and are abhorrent to human nature in general. For the fact, that a fool or madman can by no rewards or threats be induced to execute orders, or that this or that person, because he is attached to this or that religion, judges the laws of a dominion worse than any possible evil, in no wise makes void the laws of the commonwealth, since by them most of the citizens are restrained. (*PT* 3. 8)

LS: Most. Hah! Most? He wanted universal. Well, the simple exception is of course the madman. The rules which he or Hobbes establish are not applicable to madmen. Well, as practical people, we say: All right, who cares for them, they will be locked up. But we are theoreticians too, and we are confronted with a claim to true universality. And is it such an exact line of demarcation separating the madman from the sane? Is it exact? Are there not borderline cases? I mean, either we get a mathematical science—we are promised a mathematical science and we want to have it—or if they cannot give us that, they should tell us so. That is to say, they should give us rules of thumb, and then we will listen. But you see, that is the problem I discussed last time already. True universality is claimed but not reached.

Student: [inaudible]

LS: May I say one point? The distinction—don't think that this is a trivial point—the distinction between madman and non-madman implies a norm, a normal human being. Without it you cannot get any behavioral regularity. Now what was your point?

Student: In the last section of paragraph 8 he speaks of men without fear as being enemies of the commonwealth, and I take that men without fear are men who can be free, that is, a completely rational man.

LS: That would surely be the Stoic teaching. I do not remember for the moment whether Spinoza goes so far as to say that the wise man is simply free from fear. But you may be right.

Student: He seems to develop that in his notion of obedience. That is, the man who . . .

LS: Oh yes, I remember now. The passage in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*.

Student: Well even here, where he talks about reason—to follow reason is not to be obedient, but is to be free.[49] And to contract with another man on the basis of hope is also not to be free.

LS: You are quite right, yes. In other words, he develops a political teaching valid for the non-philosophers, yes?

Student: For the non-philosophers, but for those who come under this category it seems to be at odds with his statement.

LS: You mean the philosophers.

Student: Yes.

LS: Well, that the philosopher doesn't need. He can live in any society, remember?

Student: But here he spoke of enemies.

LS: All right, let us not go into that depth. We may take this up perhaps on some other occasion. But can one say that someone who is not in his innermost part bound, subject to the state, that he is from the point of view of the state an enemy?[50] From Hobbes's and Spinoza's principles,[51] [that] follows for the following reason. If men are by nature enemies, and then they form society and then they become fellow citizens and friends, everyone outside remains an enemy—the explicit teaching of Hobbes and Spinoza. Now these men, who in their highest parts are not subject, are enemies. Yes? I think I will make a note of it.

Student: But he denies that the philosopher is an enemy of the state.

LS: Can they not pose, as Aristotle would say, somehow? Surely for practical purposes philosophers were almost always lawabiding men, as we know. But in another respect they were also not so subject as most other citizens were: they are critical, and criticism is the beginning of disobedience. Let's not fool ourselves about that.

Student: That means that the state in reality should not permit philosophy, or should not permit the philosopher to exist in the state.

LS: That is a perfectly good consequence, but it is vitiated by the following consideration. Plato is the man to whom one has always to return if one wants to have some clarity about this. Plato compares the polis to a cave. A cave is some habitation or quasi-habitation which is covered, closed off. But it has a hole. A polis without such a hole is a bad polis. Uneasy coexistence, one could state the formula. Easy coexistence is too simple a solution; [it] means really a complete conformism of philosophy, i.e., the transformation of philosophy into ideology.[52] The simple strangulation does a great harm to the polis because it transforms it into a kind of savage tribe. Now if you take a somewhat broader and a more intelligent view, for commonsensical purposes the question is not only the philosophers in the narrow sense, but the poets too. The men who lead the life of the mind, they are and are not a part of the polis. That cannot be changed. Every simplistic solution leads to grave errors. To subordinate the men of the mind to the polis is

destructive of the life of the mind and makes them simple ideologists and disgraceful flatterers. That's one [solution]. The other[53], to say the polis must have the freedom of mind, that means there cannot be national boundaries because the mind cannot recognize national boundaries. And then that is destructive of civil society because a universal state you will never get, except at[54] [a] price which is ruinous. That's it. I think we must live with the fact that the most important human problems do not allow of this kind of universal solution our friend Spinoza was after, and not only he. We must keep this in mind.

I think that is the most important problem and also most illuminating for us if we think of it. And that is the attempt to find a neutral basis between the highest and the lowest. Now let me state it as follows. I state it first in Kant's form, because I think the problem is really the same in Kant as in Spinoza. Kant distinguishes two principles of action: the one he calls duty, the other he calls happiness. And by happiness he had a very loose modern notion: happiness is absolutely subjective; everyone understands happiness in his own way. Duty, on the other hand, is unambiguous, rational. Now what Kant says is: both duty or morality and amoral—not immoral, amoral—happiness equally demand external freedom. Proof: if you want to pursue happiness as you understand happiness, you must have freedom from government interference. On the other hand, if you want to do your duty, you must have the freedom to do it: If you are fettered how can you do it? So freedom is required both by the amoral motivation in man and by the moral motivation. Freedom is universally required, and therefore freedom cannot be defined in merely moral terms because freedom is also needed for the amoral happiness. If freedom were grounded only on morality you would get severe restrictions on freedom, that is clear, censorship and other things. But if freedom also has one leg on amoral happiness as distinguished from duty, then it follows that this universally valid principle of freedom allows only of such limitations as are required by freedom itself, meaning that only such limitations are needed so that all can be free. An elegant solution. The question is whether this origin, its heterogeneous origin from morality on the one hand and happiness on the other, is not an inherent vice of that solution.

Spinoza's statement of the problem is in substance very different from that of Kant, but formally the same. Spinoza makes a distinction between the wise and the vulgar, not between duty and happiness. The wise want intellectual love of God, the vulgar want comfortable self-preservation. For comfortable self-preservation—that is a dubious premise—you need freedom. For intellectual love of God you need freedom. The demand for freedom is common to both, is universally valid; and therefore also because of the heterogeneity of the reasons, ambiguous.

That is the great problem of our concept of freedom. That we must keep in mind throughout, and try to clarify. I would say that all present-day discussions of freedom of which I know are completely blind to this complicated origin. They simply follow tradition blindly, which acquires a kind of self-confirmation all the time, [a] practical self-confirmation because of the disgraceful absurdity of the alternatives as they offer themselves today: communism on the one hand, and fascism on the other. Well, every reasonable man, at least having had the experience of communism or fascism—in other words, a Russian who in 1917 became a communist could have been a sensible man, given the situation at that time. Perhaps Lenin's policy—peace immediately and land to the peasants—was the politically wise or best solution. But that of course is not a justification of communism as such, especially since it has also shown certain potentialities which were at that time not so visible. And similar considerations apply to fascism

too. For practical purposes it is very simple to see the superiority of liberal democracy and to opt for it, but that does not mean that the theoretical basis of liberal democracy [is superior], and [that] this affects also specific policies in the liberal democracies is clear. In other words, the case for liberal democracy today is the old case for limited government and for the rule of law. These are old cases which do not justify every peculiarity of liberal democracy as it exists now. Think of concrete questions, for example, the notion of what education is. And if some people would have said: Well, that is strictly teachers' and professors' affairs, Sputnik has taught the general public that is a political affair. People were so stupid that they needed this lesson. And how much the doctrine of education has been vitiated by certain democratistic notions, I think is obvious, and it is happening all over the world now, and other things too. Mr. ____?

Student: It is said some East German refugees are repulsed by the materialistic spirit prevalent in Western Germany, so they return.

LS: I never heard that. Is this really true? I know only of cases of people who were quasi-communists, or were communists, for all I know, and returned to East Germany to teach there at universities. After a very short time they were in the ashcan because they thought there would be some freedom to say something which was not anticipated by Stalin.

Student: On the whole, a handful of students.

LS: I never heard of that. And I must say, the figure in charge of East Germany seems to be a particularly loathsome fellow.[xiii] But I simply don't know. I never heard of that. But we don't have to go to Germany; you only have to turn on a TV to see that there is something wrong, there is no question of it. And that this case of van Doren was needed is in itself a disgrace,[xiv] there is no question. And that respectable business firms dare to have this kind of influence, not only in the selection of the so-called worldly things, but that they permit this kind of absolutely degrading advertisements for their things! If in a country fair a peddler were to say such things about his wares, one could say he is a poor man and he has to live, but General Motors is not in such a situation. No, honestly, that is a disgrace. One cannot say—I have no objection to this proposition, [that] in the present situation, this freedom of unscrupulous and absolutely disgraceful advertising may be an inevitable accompaniment of the most valuable freedoms, and therefore we have to swallow these disgraceful things. That is a sound political argument, provided the connection is proved. But that of course doesn't do away with the fact that we swallow something absolutely terrible. That the young generation may become immune from their childhood to these disgraceful things, may no longer be aware of it, makes it worse.

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[1] Deleted "… you did not begin your exposition by an analysis of the first chapter of the *Political Treatise*. You turned it around. [Student:] I did that deliberately. [**LS**:] You did that deliberately. But the reason wasn't clear to me, why it was preferable. [Student:] I thought the first chapter was clearer on the basis of the second. The overall scheme of it. [**LS**:] Yes, well on the other hand"

[xiii] At the time of this course, Walter Ulbricht was "First Secretary of the Central Committee" heading East Germany.

[xiv] Charles van Doren (b. 1926) is an American intellectual who was involved in a television quiz show scandal in the late 1950s.

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[2] "Deleted [Student:] A struggle against nature in the *Political Treatise?* [**LS**:] In the three chapters which we are discussing now. [Student:] Yes, in the part I quoted. [**LS**:] You didn't quote, I think. But still, what do you have in mind?"
[3] Deleted "That"
[4] Deleted "and hence"
[5] Deleted "comfortable self-preservation, let me continue on it, what I call the sub-rational good"
[6] Deleted "is a most dangerous principle because it"
[7] Deleted "The passages you see"
[8] Deleted "this"
[9] Deleted "to ascribe"
[10] Deleted "it is interesting that Spinoza"
[11] Deleted "There is a letter which the editors – you know that"
[12] Deleted "the"
[13] Deleted "of Spinoza"
[14] Deleted "[Student:] He also… [**LS**:] No, that's not the point."
[15] Deleted "sovereignly"
[16] Deleted "and that is in flat contradiction to what you said"
[17] Deleted "therefore the passions and the vices"
[18] Deleted "In English would be Cousin Betty"
[19] Deleted "there are allegedly"
[20] Deleted "How come"
[21] Deleted "Never looked"
[22] Moved "the passions are"
[23] Deleted "in doing that"
[24] Deleted "the"
[25] Deleted "What we need"
[26] Deleted "do it"
[27] Deleted "as Mr. __ has seen"
[28] Deleted "therefore Spinoza"
[29] Deleted "indeed"
[30] Deleted "I mean"
[31] Deleted "there is nothing"
[32] Deleted "to make the transition from the traditional notion"
[33] Deleted "Now"
[34] Deleted "there is"
[35] Deleted "says"
[36] Deleted "That was not necessarily"
[37] Deleted "that"
[38] Deleted "and"
[39] Deleted "Therefore – but"
[40] Deleted "Surely that is"
[41] Deleted "That shows"
[42] Deleted "and not"
[43] Deleted "You know"
[44] Deleted "many foolish"
[45] Deleted "the most powerful state – that is the next point"
[46] Deleted "But"
[47] Deleted "[Reader:] Everyone therefore…"
[48] Deleted "If you leave it—if you"
[49] Deleted "[**LS**:] Yes."
[50] Deleted "that is"
[51] Deleted "it even"
[52] Deleted "The other one"
[53] Deleted "one"
[54] Deleted "the"

Session 15: no date

Leo Strauss: There were a few points I would like to discuss briefly, raised by your paper.[i] The general welfare: Who decides what the general welfare is?

Student: The sovereign.

LS: Good. Let us leave it at that, because I am thinking of present-day discussions. What is the prevalent view in the profession now regarding general welfare, or at least a very powerful view? Mr. ____?

Student: The demands of the people.

LS: Sure. There is no general welfare. What is called general welfare is in effect a kind of resultant from a variety of factors. Now Spinoza is not of that opinion. An intelligent politician could know what the general welfare is regardless of what the demands of the people are. He is concerned only with the legal question. The wise man's opinion as to what constitutes the general welfare is not as such legally binding.

Student: But doesn't he know what is the general welfare? Doesn't that knowledge depend on a precise knowledge of the nature of man?

LS: Well, let us not be too exacting. There is a kind of crude, shrewd judgment as to what is good for the society now, for which you do not have to be a philosopher. In order to have a sound judgment as to whether you can trust Khrushchev, you do not have to be a philosopher, and similar practical things. But the crucial point here is this: Spinoza is not a relativist in this sense as it is fashionable today, [where] the general welfare is merely a word and the real thing is the interest of groups; and the result from the conflicting group interests, that is the general interest, period—which is sheer nonsense, and one can prove that, strictly, I think. Because if[1] it is impossible to have a general interest, by the same token it is impossible to speak of a group interest, because a group also consists of individuals. That is a kind of decayed Marxism. In Marxism, it made good sense because you had there the two antagonistic classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, each with its clearly defined interest. But if you use it in the way in which it is used by Bentley and his successors, it simply doesn't make sense.[ii] To repeat, for Spinoza it is merely the legal question. Every society must contain a man, or a body of men, who decide the always controversial issue as to what constitutes the general welfare. If that is left to each one to act on his opinion of what constitutes the general welfare: anarchy. That is a defensible position, but it is based on a clear problem, the problem that you cannot be certain that the wise men will be at the top. There is no essential necessity for that.

Now you were bothered by the question of the origin of the free multitude. What's so difficult about that?

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[i] Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.
[ii] Arthur Bentley (1870-1957) was an American political scientist whose work on behavioral methodology influenced the Chicago School of attempted value-free political analysis.

Student: Well, Spinoza doesn't seem to believe that there is a progress of a group of people.

LS: The issue is much cruder. You have a political society. This people may have been subjugated in a war. Then it is not a free multitude; its political subjection is imposed on it. And then there may be a people which has freely subjected to political authority. The latter is a free multitude. That's all. And this of course would come into being by the union of the previously independent individuals who unite for the sake of self-preservation.

Student: But wouldn't these previously-independent individuals be men in nature?

LS: In a state of nature, sure. That is a great difficulty, but that is somehow presupposed by these kinds of thinkers, that at least for theoretical reasons you have to assume that men are primarily independent of one another, and that is the state of nature. And then certain very powerful reasons induce them to unite, and this union is voluntary to the extent that they know it is to their best interest to enter society. That is a free multitude. What is your precise difficulty here?

Student: In chapter 6 I believe he states that civil society never completely . . .

LS: Sure. In other words, the problem you have in mind is not the beginning from a state of nature, an altogether fantastic beginning. That is a very legitimate question. I cannot state this now. Hobbes started that in the strict form; and then in Rousseau, the crisis of that, the inner impossibility came out without Rousseau drawing the conclusions from that. And since[2] Rousseau, that has disappeared from political theory, just as it did not exist before. But Spinoza is in this respect very moderate. He uses this only for the legal construction, you can say, but it doesn't belong to the political teaching proper in his case. The state of nature doctrine has the great historical importance, that they were the basis for political doctrines which put the natural rights of individuals at the top. Man enters society only in order to safeguard his pre-existing rights, his natural rights. The older doctrines which implied the primacy of duty as distinguished from right by this very fact denied the possibility of a state of nature. That is generally speaking the situation.

There was one point in which you are surely wrong. You saw quite rightly the importance of the so-called economic element in Spinoza and you referred to Locke in this connection. I think that is perfectly correct, but there is no question of economic equality.

Student: It is greater than it would be in an absolute monarchy.

LS: That is not even asserted. Spinoza is in this respect also akin to Locke, or for that matter to Madison. There are rich and poor, and the rich deserve particular treatment, get better treatment, so to say. The rational and industrious, as they were called by Locke. There is a presumption—you know, they were not so much in favor of the underdog as not to cherish the assumption that generally speaking the people who get money and keep it—not the playboys—and to keep it requires a virtue, and there is something to that. Unfortunately I don't belong to that class of people, but there is something to that. To repeat, to be born rich doesn't bespeak any merit, just accident; but to remain rich requires some virtue. It may also [happen] by accident[3] due to chance, but that will never count, because anyone by accident might get all kinds of things.

Now let us turn[4] to our subject, and[5] read first the first sentence of chapter 4. Whoever has it, read it.

Reader:

> That the right of the supreme authorities is limited by their power, we showed in the last chapter, and saw that the most important of that right is, that they are, as it were, the mind of the dominion, whereby all ought to be guided.

LS: The mind, *mens*. But what is that mind? Sovereignty is the mind of the government, of the state. What is that mind? There are two historically well-known alternatives [of] how to understand the mind of a society. No romanticism—very old fashioned, practical people. There was one key alternative.

Student: I think that earlier he has identified the mind with the self-interest of the people.

LS:[6] Self-interest is an object of mental acts, you can say, but it is not the mind.

Student: Reason.

LS: But still, reason would discover itself. That is exactly the question: Is it reason or is it will? Mind is neutral to that decision. The old view was reason, reason modified by all kinds of things—mitigated reason one could say. But it was reason. The view of the typically modern thinkers was will—*volonté générale.* The general will is Rousseau's formula, but which is anticipated by Hobbes in particular. One finds a simple discussion of that subject in Hobbes's *De Cive*, *On the Citizen*, chapter 6, paragraph 19. I cannot go into that now. But I would say that in Spinoza it is surely ambiguous whether it is reason or will, for obvious reasons. He wants it to be perfectly rational but he knows that there is a problem whether the sovereignty will be rational. Now the problem in this chapter is this. Sovereignty is omnicompetent, omnipotent. But this is only a legal assertion, it is not simply true. The state is, as he puts it—let us read paragraph 4, from the beginning.

Reader:

> But it is often asked, whether the supreme authority is bound by laws, and, consequently, whether it can do wrong. Now as the words "law" and "wrongdoing" often refer not merely to the laws of a commonwealth, but also to the general rules which concern all natural things, and especially to the general rules of reason, we cannot, without qualification, say that the commonwealth is bound by no laws, or can do no wrong. For were the commonwealth bound by no laws or rules, which removed, the commonwealth were no commonwealth, we should have to regard it not as a natural thing, but as a chimera. A commonwealth then does wrong, when it does, or suffers to be done, things which may be the cause of its own ruin; and we can say that it then does wrong, in the sense in which philosophers or doctors say that nature does wrong; and in this sense we can say, that a commonwealth does wrong, when it acts against the dictate of reason. (*PT* 4. 4)

LS: Let us stop here. So the state is a natural thing, and therefore it is necessarily subject to law. No natural thing is unlimited and can do what it pleases; it is subject to laws which cannot be transgressed. The terminology of Spinoza is remarkable in contrast to that of Hobbes, with whom he shares so many things, because Hobbes's whole thesis is based on the distinction between natural bodies and artificial bodies, artificial bodies being states above everything else. For Spinoza the state is simply a natural thing, for Hobbes that is not so; and as he indicated in his letter, this brief remark [about] the difference between him and Hobbes which we read on a former occasion: I keep natural right completely intact, i.e., Hobbes does not do that.[iii] Hobbes allows a dualism between the natural and the moral or political which Spinoza does not recognize. The difference is in fact not as great, but theoretically it is of great importance.

Student: In the *Leviathan*, chapter 29, when he talks about the disintegration of a state, the analogy is of disintegration, as a disease is in the body.

LS: You mean when the associations are compared to worms?

Student: When the whole body politic is compared to the body.

LS: But it is there really a comparison, and even a jocular comparison in places, as you must have seen. Spinoza is sure that political science is a kind of physics. For Hobbes that is not so. I mentioned last time to you that Hobbes admitted a similarity in formal structure between his *Leviathan* and Plato's *Republic*. Spinoza never said that. This difference cannot be minimized. I fully agree that Spinoza and Hobbes are infinitely closer to one another than either of them is to Plato, but the way of understanding political science differs quite a bit in the two men. For Hobbes, the primary function is the free rational construction of a commonwealth, regardless of whether that commonwealth has ever existed or will ever exist. For Spinoza, it is rather (as we have seen in the first chapter) the attempt to understand the rationality of the actual. That must not be minimized. You find these two [different] tendencies throughout[7] modern times[8] but they must not blind one to the fact that these modern thinkers have something in common among themselves in spite of all divergences which separate them radically from the classics. This must not be blurred by what I said. Yes?

Student: I have another question. You referred to the letter. There is also the footnote which we looked at, where he speaks of reason being a motive for peace, and then he says this is not so in Hobbes.[iv]

LS: Is that not in chapter 16? Let me find it, otherwise we have to postpone the discussion. Yes, "in whatever state man lives he can be free. For surely man is free to the extent to which he is guided by reason. But [n.b., Hobbes thinks differently—LS] reason demands, counsels, peace universally." That is the key passage. Well, one can interpret this as follows. According to Hobbes's official teaching, reason counsels peace only after the establishment of society, and Spinoza says reason commands peace simply—which however would not fit the fact, because Spinoza says also in the state of nature you would be a great fool if you would behave

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[iii] Letter 50, to Jelles.
[iv] Annotation 33 to the *TTP*.

peacefully. He goes even further in this respect than Hobbes. Hobbes[9] [asks] this great question: Must you keep promises to which you are compelled at gunpoint? Hobbes says: Yes, prior to civil society, disregarding the civil law, because the state rests on that. The state has come into being out of fear. Now if promises made from fear were not valid, the state would lack a moral basis. Spinoza says no, because what you do under the influence of sheer fear you do not mean. In other words, Spinoza allows much greater freedom, so to speak, in the state of nature, theoretically, than Hobbes does.[10]

I have a note. "This note may refer to Hobbes's notion of liberty." In other words, maybe the note is inserted at the wrong place[v]—this parenthesis. Here the difference is glaring. For Hobbes, freedom means that you are not bodily impeded, and Spinoza says: No, that is much too low a notion of freedom; freedom means the same as rationality. I do not know at the moment where this note existed in the edition made by Spinoza. I think they were inserted by the editors after Spinoza's death. They were written by Spinoza. I think they were written into his own copy and then printed after his death.[vi] It is easy to look it up in Gebhardt's edition. But I am almost sure that they were not in Spinoza's own edition; and you know when you make a marginal note you do not do it in the final form. As it stands, it doesn't make sense to me. If he would say, here is this sentence: "Man is free to that extent to which he is guided by reason"; there "Hobbes thinks differently": [that] fits in beautifully, because Hobbes has this narrow notion of freedom: if you are not chained, you are free; [you are free] if you can circulate. And Spinoza says: No, that is a very poor kind of freedom. That we discussed before.

To come back to our point, the state is a natural thing and therefore necessarily subject to laws which it cannot transgress, clearly. For example, the state cannot say: We will be tomorrow on the back side of the moon, and other things. Or as they say of the British Parliament, it can do everything except transform a man into a woman. But now Spinoza identifies this with the following proposition: the state cannot act against the dictates of reason without destroying itself. That would mean the state is necessarily rational, and this of course is a fantastic proposition. Think of the enormous variety of states and various forms of polity, and that is unfortunately not true that a state destroys itself by acting irrationally, because other states too act irrationally and therefore they cancel each other out—their stupidity, if I may say so. He also says, a bit more cautiously: the state cannot act against the dictates of reason without weakening itself. That is more defensible, but as I say, that need not be fatal. What he wants to suggest is that the dictates of reason are self-enforcing. That would be a beauty, but it isn't true.

The most powerful state is the most rational state. Well, since every state wants to be powerful it wants to be rational. That is a very sanguine thing. Even that, that they want to be powerful, is unfortunately not true because there is an inertia which is opposed even to any effort directed toward the most massive and crude self-interest. The notion that man is concerned passionately and vigorously with his self-interest on the lowest level is not true. Man is much too lazy a creature to do that, as the economists have found out, when they study[11] [why] the Scots are so

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[v] The annotation reads "For certainly a man is free, insofar as he is led by reason. Now reason (though Hobbes thinks otherwise) is always on the side of peace." Strauss is suggesting that the parenthetical remark should be affixed to the end of the first sentence.

[vi] Strauss is correct: the annotations were added by Spinoza to the margins of the TTP manuscript after its initial publication and were included by editors in the editions after his death.

different from the people in Naples, to say nothing of places farther away. You know the famous question. Spinoza is aware of that problem and let us see how he will gradually solve it.

Let us look at the next paragraph. Well, he gives some examples which make sense, of course; he gives examples of governors who behave in an absolutely impossible way [and] destroy all respect for themselves. He uses very extreme examples [of governors] who run naked and drunk with whores through the streets. But unfortunately Hitler and such people, or Stalin, did not do that. Stalin was frequently drunk, as we know, but wasn't drunk in public.[12] [That] would violate openly the laws they have laid down. (Well, they don't have to violate them openly.) I also thought of the interesting case—there was a story that Hitler had murdered a niece of his. I don't know whether that is true or not, but one thing was obvious to me. There was no possibility of course of finding out as long as he ruled. In other words, if a sovereign violates the laws openly, this cannot be brought home by law courts subject to the sovereign. That's clear. But that there are limits, we all grant; but the really clever and dangerous tyrants have avoided these gross errors of which Spinoza here is speaking. Now let us read the next paragraph.

Reader:

> We see, then, in what sense we may say, that a commonwealth is bound by laws and can do wrong. But if by "law" we understand civil law, and by "wrong" that which, by civil law, is forbidden to be done, that is, if these words be taken in their proper sense, we cannot at all say, that a commonwealth is bound by laws, or can do wrong. For the maxims and motives of fear and reverence, which a commonwealth is bound to observe in its own interest, pertain not to civil jurisprudence, but to the law of nature, since they cannot be vindicated by the civil law, but by the law of war. And a commonwealth is bound by them in no other sense than that in which in the state of nature a man is bound to take heed, that he preserve his independence and be not his own enemy, lest he should destroy himself; and in this taking heed lies not the subjection, but the liberty of human nature.

LS: Let us stop here. Not subjection: obedience, *obsequium*. The state is not subject to law strictly speaking. That it is not subject to the positive law is obvious, because it can change them, but it is also not subject to the natural or divine laws, because Spinoza denies that there are such laws. The state does not obey anyone. It is free. Freedom and obedience as Spinoza understands them are incompatible, and the great question therefore is: How can there be civil obedience identical with freedom? That's the great question. We will pursue that further when we come to that. The theme of this chapter 4 is then this: there is no legal limitation to sovereignty. But there are factual limitations. Beyond the sphere of law there is another sphere, we can say the sphere of politics proper. But Spinoza calls this sphere harshly and bluntly the sphere where the right of war obtains. In Locke's politer language: the appeal to heaven. You remember that? When there is an impossible government, no legal redress possible, then Locke says: appeal to heaven. But it means of course exactly the same as what Spinoza says: war. Revolution, which is of course a form of war. That exists. The difference of language is of course very amusing in itself. It is much nicer to speak of the appeal to heaven than of the right to war.

Now we turn to chapter 5 which deals with the best state of[13] government. Here the question of the standard, which we have been worrying about so much comes to the fore. Let us read the first paragraph.

Reader:

> In Chapter II we showed, that man is then most independent, when he is most led by reason, and, in consequence (Chap. III. Sec. 7), that that commonwealth is most powerful and most independent, which is founded and guided by reason. But, as the best plan of living, so as to assure to the utmost self-preservation, is that which is framed according to the dictate of reason, therefore it follows, that that in every kind is best done, which a man or commonwealth does, so far as he or it is in the highest degree independent. For it is one thing to till a field by right, and another to till it in the best way. (*PT* 5. 1)

LS: And so on. In other words, that is the great question between, say, power, and reasonable exercise of power. And the greatest question, although not the only question, is of course the question of the wise exercise of power and not the question of mere power, how much power is given to someone. The standard of goodness is here defined by a very general word: rationality. The best state is the most rational state, but that of course is not very helpful. The explanation is given in the following paragraph.

Reader:

> Now the quality of the state of any dominion is easily perceived from the end of the civil state, which end is nothing else but peace and security of life.

LS: No, "the best" is missing. There was a printing error from the beginning. It has been restored by an editor: "what the best state of any government is can easily be recognized from the end of the civil state." That is an old story, evident to common sense.

Reader:

> And therefore that dominion is the best, where men pass their lives in unity, and the laws are kept unbroken.

LS: No, no.[14] "Which state of any government whatever is best can easily be known from the end of the civil association, which end is nothing other than peace and the security of life, and therefore that government or empire is best where men lead their life in concord, and the rights of which, namely the government are preserved inviolate." Go on.

Reader:

> For it is certain, that seditions, wars, and contempt or breach of the laws are not so much to be imputed to the wickedness of the subjects, as to the bad state of a dominion. For men are not born fit for citizenship, but must be made so. Besides, men's natural passions are everywhere the same; and if wickedness more prevails, and more offences are committed in one commonwealth than in another, it is certain that the former has not enough pursued the end of unity, nor framed its laws with sufficient forethought; and that, therefore, it has failed in making quite good its right as a commonwealth. (*PT* 5. 2)

LS: In a word, the end of society is peace and security of life, and this peace exists inseparable from and even identical with obedience to the laws. Up to now that is sheer Hobbes or, in a way, crude common sense. In the crude common sense way it is of course true, but then he makes in the next paragraph a crucial addition: peace thus understood requires virtue. Even that could be, [in fact] was, granted by Hobbes on a very low level. For example, if someone is habitually drunk and assails other people, he is not a peaceful citizen. So you must have some degree of virtue to be a peaceful man. But more precisely, paragraph 4.

Student: Where was this virtue?

LS: In paragraph 3. "Just as the wisest of the subjects, great license and contumacy has to be imputed to the state, in the same way the virtue of the citizens and their constant observation of the laws has to be ascribed in the highest degree to the virtue of the state and its absolute right." Yes?

Student: He draws a distinction between these virtues.

LS: Which virtues?

Student: The virtue of the state and the virtue of the citizen.

LS: Sure, but in a different sense. Virtue can have a quasi-amoral meaning of efficiency or efficacy. That is not very important. Paragraph 4 is very important. Let us see.

Reader:

> Of a commonwealth, whose subjects are but hindered by terror from taking arms, it should rather be said, that it is free from war, than that it has peace. For peace is not mere absence of war, but is a virtue that springs from force of character.

LS: No, "from the fortitude of mind" would be a better translation, or "strength of mind."

Reader:

> for obedience (Chap. II. Sec. 19) is the constant will to execute what, by the general decree of the commonwealth, ought to be done. Besides that commonwealth, whose peace depends on the sluggishness of its subjects, that are led about like sheep, to learn but slavery, may more properly be called a desert than a commonwealth. (*PT* 5. 4)
>
> When, then, we call that dominion best, where men pass their lives in unity, I understand a human life, defined not by mere circulation of the blood, and other qualities common to all animals, but above all by reason, the true excellence and life of the mind. (*PT* 5. 5)

LS: Let us stop here. Here the break with Hobbes is very clear. Hobbes is not mentioned, but he is meant here. Peace is a virtue which stems from strength of mind—not what Hobbes meant,

this low fear of violent death; it stems from strength of mind. And yet this virtue, freedom, is identical with obedience. Well, common sense would easily see it. But we have seen the reference here in the fourth chapter as well as some passages of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* that a free man does not obey.[15] This is a great problem. For example, in chapter 2, paragraph 20, the rational life is not obedience—explicitly said. But here he seems to say the rational life is obedience. Differently stated:[16] obedience[17] [cannot be] rationality,[18] [because] the multitude is incapable of the rational life. Never forget that. Both rulers and ruled are incapable of the rational life properly speaking, as is explained in the first chapter. So there is here a hidden premise, which we have observed frequently: the subrational good, as we call it, not the rational life properly speaking, intellectual love of God, but intellectual self-preservation plus comfortable self-preservation, this is the end which the multitude can grasp and for which it can work. And what Spinoza is trying to do is to say that the requirements of comfortable self-preservation and the requirements of the intellectual love of God coincide. The two ends are heterogeneous, obviously, but the requirements are the same. And therefore what the philosophers need for philosophy and what the worldly need for comfortable self-preservation agree perfectly. And therefore they both—the worldling, if he is a sensible fellow, and the philosopher—belong, without any difficulty and friction, to the same society. You remember what I said last time about the characteristic difficulty of the two heterogeneous motivations underlying the modern concept of liberty in the case of Kant too.

We can't read all these things. I only want to say that in the next paragraph Spinoza makes clear a point which had been emphasized by Hobbes, that however great the difference may be between what came to be called despotism and a non-despotic society, the legal rights of the sovereign are in both cases the same. The sovereign is everywhere omnicompetent. Everywhere.[19] Read the last sentence of paragraph 6:[20] "although under the government which is created by a free multitude, and that which is required by the right of war"; if you consider the right of each generally there is no essential difference, but if you consider their end and also the means by which each must be preserved, [the two] are very different. But legally there is no difference, that is the point. And the next paragraph is the famous paragraph about Machiavelli, about which Miss ____ has reported. We cannot go into that. We have no time to go into that.

Now chapters 6 and 7 deal with monarchy; 8, 9, and 10 with aristocracy. Eleven and so on would have dealt with democracy, but Spinoza died before he could finish them. And the relation of chapters 6 and 7 is simple: 6 develops the best monarchic institutions, and 7 gives the reasons for them drawn from the nature of man.

In paragraph 1 he develops the point that all men desire by nature civil life. That is not understood here teleologically, that man is ordered by nature towards civil life. But man has passions which, combined with certain calculations, push him. He is not attracted by civil life, so to speak, but he is pushed toward it by his passions. In the next paragraph he speaks of the form of society, and he uses here very strangely the very old term, the "face." Read paragraph 2.

Reader:

> Accordingly, from the quarrels and seditions which are often stirred up in a commonwealth, it never results that the citizens dissolve it, as often happens in the case of other associations; but only that they change its form into some

> other—that is, of course, if the disputes cannot be settled, and the features of the commonwealth at the same time preserved. (*PT* 6. 2)

LS: "Features," he says. Well, literally, the face. He goes as it were back to a very early meaning of the term form. You know the Greek word *eidos* means primarily the shape, the visible shape—and no part of the visible shape, of a human being especially, is more conspicuous than the face. But this is only terminology.[vii] The next paragraph we must read.

Reader:

> But if human nature were so constituted, that men most desired what is most useful, no art would be needed to produce unity and confidence. But, as it is admittedly far otherwise with human nature, a dominion must of necessity be so ordered, that all, governing and governed alike, whether they will or no, shall do what makes for the general welfare; that is, that all, whether of their own impulse, or by force or necessity, shall be compelled to live according to the dictate of reason. And this is the case, if the affairs of the dominion be so managed, that nothing which affects the general welfare is entirely entrusted to the good faith of any one. For no man is so watchful, that he never falls asleep; and no man ever had a character so vigorous and honest, but he sometimes, and that just when strength of character was most wanted, was diverted from his purpose and let himself be overcome. And it is surely folly to require of another what one can never obtain from one's self; I mean, that he should be more watchful for another's interest than his own, that he should be free from avarice, envy, and ambition, and so on; especially when he is one, who is subject daily to the strongest temptations of every passion. (*PT* 6. 3)

LS: That is characteristic of the spirit of Spinoza, and not only of Spinoza. I do not remember now the many passages in the *Federalist Papers* which deal with exactly this problem in the same spirit. Men cannot be trusted. Institutions must be so that they cannot misuse their power. Rationality is to be brought about, rational conduct is brought about by non-rational means, by the passions. Here is one point which you raised. No one can obtain for himself that he should watch more for another than for himself—for another meaning for the state. That implies charity is impossible, although it is not yet clearly stated. Everyone loves[21] himself [most]. In other words, he is speaking here about monarchy, how to construct a monarchy which is most conducive to the human good in the double meaning—the true good of man and the subrational good—but with the greater emphasis on the subrational good, because that is the one which the majority of men can understand and desire.

The first conclusion which he draws in the next paragraph is against absolute monarchy. Absolute monarchy might be the best thing if freedom from sedition were the end of society, but, as we know, comfortable self-preservation, or pursuit of happiness as each understands

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[vii] Spinoza uses this term "face" elsewhere, such as *facies totius Universi*, the "face of the whole universe," to describe one of the mediate infinite modes of God (see letter 64, to Schuller). In the passage read in class (*Political Treatise* chapter 6.2), Spinoza uses the same Latin term *facie*, not the Greek *eidos* as Strauss somewhat implies.

happiness, is the end, and this requires freedom. Absolute monarchy is out. That is of course also clearly anti-Hobbean. Now let us turn to paragraph 6.

Reader:

> It is also certain, that a commonwealth is always in greater danger from its citizens than from its enemies; for the good are few. Whence it follows, that he, upon whom the whole right of the dominion has been conferred, will always be more afraid of citizens than of enemies, and therefore will look to his own safety, and not try to consult his subjects' interests, but to plot against them, especially against those who are renowned for learning, or have influence through wealth. (*PT* 6. 6)

LS:[22] You see? The fellows endangered by an absolute monarchy are the men who are conspicuous or resplendent by wisdom, or more powerful by virtue of wealth. The wealthy too have to be considered very much. He is concerned not only with the wise but with the rich as well.

I skip quite a few things here. The crucial point in this monarchy (that is not the old monarchy of the ancient regime, as you see, which didn't exist, at least not in Europe) [is] no hereditary nobility. The only nobility is the royal family. And clearly, if you want to have a monarchy, a monarchy proper, a hereditary monarchy, then the blood royal must have a special status and a special legal protection. Mr. ____?

Student: May I ask a general question?[23] In what sense were[24] [these thinkers] guided by the observation that what peace and order obtain in the world as it is must be due to the invisible workings of certain fundamental passions? In other words, what would the evidence be that certain passions lead to rational political action?

LS: Very simple. For example, let us assume there is a wise law, and it must be enforced. If it is not enforced people will not obey it.

Student: If everyone in civil society were motivated by selfish passion, one would think at first glance: anarchy.

LS: Yes, but on the other hand, the thing is complicated. There are passions in man which are anti-social, and they are in themselves most powerful. But there is also in all men, with a few exceptions, an awareness of the fact that there must be society. Where could the gangsters get their loot, if there were not people who didn't produce that ice or whatever they are after? The gangsters thrive on non-gangsters. No one would work if he didn't have a reasonable security of getting the fruit of his labor. So there is also a motivation for peaceful living together, but this peaceful living together, this motivation is not strong enough to repress the anti-social passions if the desire for peaceful living together is not organized and armed. That is the sovereign, that is the law, that is the police. This can work. The motivation behind it may very well be nothing higher than to live peaceably and comfortably. A passion. People[25] [might be] slaves of wealth, the opposite of rationality, yet this low irrational passion works in the direction of peace. There is

by nature a tug of war between anti-social and peaceable conduct, and the tug of war is decided by arming only the peaceable forces. That is government.

Student: The peaceful passions.

LS: Yes, the passions.

Student: What order we have is due to the peaceable passions.

LS: Sure. Well, not only—there are also sensible people, who for reasons do that. That was Hobbes's point. Behind this terrific apparatus, the state, there is nothing but the passion of fear of violent death. Sure.

Another point of some interest is in paragraph 26. He opposes torture as a means of judicial procedure. In paragraph 27 there is something amusing. Just read that.

Reader:

> Of these judges, there should be a large and odd number—for instance, sixty-one, or at least forty-one,—and not more than one is to be chosen of one clan, and that not for life, but every year a certain proportion are to retire, and be replaced by as many others out of different clans, that have reached their fortieth year. (*PT* 6. 27)

LS: Fifty-one and so on. Do you notice something? These are of course mere examples, but they have something in common. Sixty-one, fifty-one, not only that they are odd numbers. Why does he not say thirty-one and thirty-seven? Is there a judicial system in which a similar figure played a role? The Sanhedrin, the Jewish Sanhedrin, had seventy-one. That is a reminder of that. It is not seventy-one. That is a little joke. Let us turn to paragraph 32.

Reader:

> If a foreigner takes to wife the daughter of a citizen, his children are to be counted citizens, and put on the roll of their mother's clan. But those who are born and bred within the dominion of foreign parents should be allowed to purchase at a fixed price the right of citizenship from the captains of thousands of any clan, and to be enrolled in that clan. For no harm can arise thence to the dominion, even though the captains of thousands, for a bribe, admit a foreigner into the number of their citizens for less than the fixed price; but, on the contrary, means should be devised for more easily increasing the number of citizens, and producing a large confluence of men. As for those who are not enrolled as citizens, it is but fair that, at least in war-time, they should pay for their exemption from service by some forced labour or tax. (*PT* 6. 32)

LS: By the way, "fair" [means] "equitable" in Latin. That is one of many passages in which Spinoza speaks of equity, although there is no question of positive law. According to his official teaching, equity depends on positive law, but the nature of things compels him to speak of equity in connections where no positive law is presupposed. That is a kind of a part of a proof that one cannot do away with natural right. Certain things are in themselves equitable or inequitable

regardless of what the legislator may say. On the contrary, the legislator can be judged to be a good or bad legislator with a view as to whether he complies with that equity or not. But that was not the reason why I thought we should read this paragraph. The principle: a liberal naturalization policy. Do you know something of the prehistory of that?

Student: Rome?

LS: More theoretically, that has been an issue in political theory. Yes?

Student: Plato made the point foreigners should not be encouraged.

LS: Sure, the Greek classics were fairly restrictive. But there was one great thinker who put a great emphasis on a liberal naturalization policy: Machiavelli. In the *Discourses*, somewhere in the second book, I believe in chapter 2 or thereabouts.[viii] Rome became great by a liberal naturalization policy. And then it was taken up by a great British Machiavellian, Bacon, somewhere in the *Essays*. I have forgotten the number.[ix] And[26] this measure, which seems to us so liberal and philanthropic, had very much to do with power politics: increasing the physical power of the populace, having more soldiers. So you see, the same measure can have a very different meaning in very different contexts.

As a little point, paragraph 38.

Reader:

> If the king die leaving no male issue, let the next to him in blood be held the heir to the dominion, unless he chance to have married a foreign wife, whom he will not put away. (*PT* 6. 38)

LS: Tough, yes? What would Spinoza say, if you say: Are you are not too tough on that poor prince? The case of the Duke of Windsor was not quite the same,[x] as you know. Well, tough to one individual in this particular situation is very humane toward the society as a whole, that is the feeling which goes through. No foreign wives for kings, because otherwise you get into all the family troubles, inheritance questions, succession questions which breed war.

The last paragraph is of the utmost importance.

Reader:

> As for religion, no temples whatever ought to be built at the public expense; nor ought laws to be established about opinions, unless they be seditious and overthrow the foundations of the commonwealth.

LS: You remember, this always remains: no hundred-percent freedom of opinion. Seditious opinions cannot be tolerated. In this present situation, it would of course mean that the preaching

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[viii] Strauss probably intends book 2, chapter 3.

[ix] Probably Essay 29, “Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates.”

[x] The Duke of Windsor, formerly Edward VIII, abdicated the throne in 1936 in order to marry a divorced American woman, Wallis Simpson.

of communism could very well be forbidden. In other words, it is a mere matter of expedience, and not a question of an inherent impossibility. Yes?

Reader:

> And so let such as are allowed the public exercise of their religion build a temple at their own expense. But the king may have in his palace a chapel of his own, that he may practice the religion to which he belongs. (*PT* 6. 40)

LS: Yes. Very interesting. In a monarchy, no public religion. Again, prehistory—in this case, it is really helpful to understand it. Machiavelli,[27] in the *Discourses* book 1, chapter 11, that is discussed. [If] you want a free society, or a republic, then you must have a religion—Machiavelli's teaching—because that alone would enable people to live well together. Machiavelli doesn't care much which religion; a pagan religion would do perfectly, but a religion. But in a monarchy, where the power is so strongly centralized and the social bond is the power of the monarchy, including the army, naturally religion is not needed. And the great [historical] illustration of that[28] is the so-called enlightened despotism of the eighteenth century.[xi]

—Spinoza shares this view. When we come to aristocracy—democracy he didn't write, but I am sure he would have done the same thing: public religion.

Student: Wouldn't he want virtue, hence religion, even in a monarchy?

LS: Virtue is an ambiguous word.[29] It can mean the virtue inspired by the belief in revelation; it can mean what Spinoza regards as true virtue, and quite a few other things too. That is not decided by the mere word, virtue. But the statement of Montesquieu later on, that virtue is the principle of democracy—in other words, no [other] government is as much in need of virtue as a public principle—that is of course only another way of saying what Machiavelli and Spinoza meant. Well, the development of the thought would be roughly as follows. In a monarchy, even in an aristocracy, you do not need widespread public spirit. In a democracy, where everyone is in theory responsible for what is happening in the society, public spirit must be widespread. How do you get a widespread public spirit? One way, and perhaps the most important way, is that which tells you to love thy neighbor like thyself because enlarged, that is of course all your neighbors. Society, religion.

It is very interesting to see what is going on at present in political science, the new theory of democracy for which they are seeking. Some of you may have seen the book of Mr. Dahl, *Preface to a Democratic Theory*, but also in Berelson's *Voting Studies*, and so on.[xii] The great discovery made by present-day political science is that the greatest virtue of modern democracy is electoral apathy, i.e., the clearest sign of complete absence of public spirit. Well, the remark in itself is not so entirely foolish, because in many cases it is really better people [inaudible][xiii] do

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[xi] The tape was changed at this point.
[xii] Robert Dahl (1915-2014) was a major American political scientist of the twentieth century. Bernard Berelson (1912-1979) was an American behavioral scientist with a focus on public opinion and democracy. Strauss is presumably referring to his *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign* (1954).
[xiii] There is a blank space in the transcript here.

not vote. People are politically indifferent because they would, if politically aroused, only cherish lunatic causes. That is the thought behind that. But still, nevertheless it shows a terrific problem. We have traveled very far from Montesquieu and similar people when we hear this kind of thing. There is something very wrong both with our political theory and with our political practice, if this is somehow declared to be the last word of political wisdom.

But the point—to repeat, when you need public spirit, you need practically speaking religion. That is what they mean, what Spinoza also means. If it is a regime which is fundamentally monarchic, you do not need public spirit to the same extent, and therefore no need for public religion. Because[30] the undeniable fact, as we will see when we come to chapter 8 following, is that in the aristocracy, i.e., the republic: public religion. No public religion in a monarchy. This is the fact which must be interpreted. Did you want to say something?

Student: In what sense is the monarchy not in need of public religion?

LS: That is not what he means. If the public power is concentrated and therefore strong, the other social bonds do not have to be so strong. But if the power is more dispersed, as it is in any republican government, the social bonds must be stronger. But religion is one of the most important, perhaps *the* most important social bond. That is the thought.

Student: He would approve of something like Henry VIII, himself the head of a pre-existing church.

LS: But he doesn't like that, because in that case—why would Spinoza tacitly disapprove of such a thing? Because Henry VIII established a church and was the head that establishment. And Spinoza wants a disestablishment of the church in a monarchy. Why?[31] Monarchy has great defects from his point of view, but it has this advantage: that it can afford a greater freedom of opinion than a republic. He is speaking here not simply of monarchy, but of the best monarchy; and the best monarchy would from his point of view have the advantage of having no established religion and therefore having an infinitely greater freedom of opinion than an established religion would allow. That I think is the point. But that is already (as I have said) to say the least, foreshadowed by Machiavelli. Mr. ____?

Student: In the monarchy he describes, there seems to be so much republican[ism]. I don't see why religion isn't a part.

LS: That is a very good point. In other words, you mean the importance of the council. That is true. But the council, as you must have seen, has an entirely advisory function.

Student: He also mentions the fact that it is an executive and executes the laws.

LS: But all the power is derivative from the king. It does not have any governmental power proper, except in certain particular cases like [when] the royal line is terminated, and the education of the heir apparent [becomes an issue], and this kind of thing.

There is a point here which is all the more striking[32] [in] paragraph 40.[xiv]

Student: I was thinking, it executes the orders which the king gives. It is solely entrusted with[33] executing these orders. Except for giving the orders, the king has nothing more to do with it.

LS: You are right. It is by no means an absolute monarchy, but a limited monarchy. And yet the council, the parliament, does not make the decisions. They are the king's.

Student: Later on he says the king passes a law, it would be the duty of the civil officials not to obey it.[xv]

LS: If there is only a tiny part of the council in favor of a law, then the king cannot pass it, this kind of thing. I know that. But I would say [it is] all the more striking[34] [that] although Spinoza's monarchy is not an absolute monarchy—very far from it[35]—since it is a monarchy, no public religion. Whereas in the aristocracy, or the republic at any rate, it needs popular religion, as you can see.

Now let us come to the last chapter. What Spinoza proposes, we can say, would be called in our language a constitutional monarchy, one in which there is public liberty. The characteristic of the constitutional monarchy, one characteristic, is the distinction made between the king as a public person and the king as a private person—you know, a distinction made in English public law in the seventeenth century, and there not always liked. It was a kind of lawyer's distinction which didn't suit the absolutistic tendencies of the kings too well. Now let us read paragraph 2.

Reader:

> It must next be observed, that in laying foundations it is very necessary to study the human passions: and it is not enough to have shown, what ought to be done, but it ought, above all, to be shown how it can be effected, that men, whether led by passion or reason, should yet keep the laws firm and unbroken. For if the constitution of the dominion, or the public liberty depends only on the weak assistance of the laws, not only will the citizens have no security for its maintenance (as we showed in the third section of the last chapter), but it will even turn to their ruin. For this is certain, that no condition of a commonwealth is more wretched than that of the best, when it begins to totter, unless at one blow it falls with a rush into slavery, which seems to be quite impossible. And, therefore, it would be far better for the subjects to transfer their rights absolutely to one man, than to bargain for unascertained and empty, that is unmeaning, terms of liberty, and so prepare for their posterity a way to the most cruel servitude. But if I succeed in showing that the foundation of monarchical dominion, which I stated in the last chapter, are firm and cannot be plucked up, without the indignation of the larger part of an armed multitude, and that from them follow peace and

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[xiv] Due perhaps to the student's remark that follows, the important paragraph 40 is not explored. It starts off, "As for religion, no temples whatever ought to be built at the public expense; nor ought laws to be established about opinions, unless they be seditious and overthrow the foundations of the commonwealth."

[xv] Apparently a reference to *Political Treatise* VII.1

> security for king and multitude, and if I deduce this from general human nature, no one will be able to doubt, that these foundations are the best and the true ones. (*PT* 7. 2)

LS: The crucial point is [that] the laws as laws are weak. The political institutions are decisive, and the crucial political institution is the armed multitude. As Aristotle knew in advance, and as later experience has shown again, this is of course a very problematic thing. It depends very much on the state of the armament. At the time when the infantry rifle or the "gat" was the most important weapon,[xvi] democracy was supported by purely military considerations—the great equalizer, I believe it was called in this country at one time. But when you had, for example as in medieval times, the clear superiority of the knight to any foot soldier, democracy wouldn't do. And with the emergence of these superweapons in more recent times—the machine gun alone gives an enormous advantage of one man to many men, but now if you can drop bombs on a city or village, the situation is greatly different. And not everyone can possess a first-rate bomber, so that creates great problems. In fairness to Aristotle, we must say that Aristotle has seen this problem very clearly and discussed it in his *Politics*, whereas in these modern times this has been neglected. Let us turn to paragraph 4.

Reader:

> But as human nature is so constituted, that everyone seeks with the utmost passion his own advantage, and judges those laws to be most equitable, which he thinks necessary to preserve and increase his substance, and defends another's cause so far only as he thinks he is thereby establishing his own; it follows hence, that the counsellors chosen must be such, that their private affairs and their own interests depend on the general welfare and peace of all. And so it is evident, that if from every sort or class of citizens a certain number be chosen, what has most votes in such a council will be to the interest of the greater part of the subjects. And though this council, because it is composed of so large a number of citizens, must of necessity be attended by many of very simple intellect, yet this is certain, that everyone is pretty clever and sagacious in business which he has long and eagerly practiced. And, therefore, if none be chosen but such as have till their fiftieth year practiced their own business without disgrace, they will be fit enough to give their advice about their own affairs, especially if, in matters of considerable importance, a time be allowed for consideration. Besides, it is far from being the fact, that a council composed of a few is not frequented by this kind of men. For, on the contrary, its greatest part must consist of such, since everyone, in that case, tries hard to have dullards for colleagues, that they may hang on his words, for which there is no opportunity in large councils. (*PT* 7. 4)

LS: What he presupposes here again is what we may call the natural impossibility of charity. Everyone thinks: me first. Therefore we need such councilors whose private interest is inseparable from the public good in the narrowest way. This is the principle of the *Federalist Papers*, as you may recall.[36] The majority of the council will be concerned with the benefit of the majority of the citizen body.[37] [Even] disregarding the question of the minority, disregarding that entirely, a few difficulties arise here. In the first place,[38] there may be a class interest of the

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[xvi] The Gatling gun was first used during the American Civil War.

representatives. The question inclining all men in favor of direct democracy, or in other ways Sorel's criticism.[xvii] Spinoza says that can easily be taken care of by frequent election and no possibility of reelection, and especially by the largeness of the assembly. The second difficulty is the lack of judgment. The majority may [inaudible][xviii] mean well by the majority, but they may not have proper judgment, to which Spinoza replies: Well, only a crude kind of judgment is needed for such matters. You don't have to be a philosopher to see that a progressive income tax is more favorable to the poor than a tax on food, for example. You don't need profound metaphysical studies for that, that is easily available.

In the next paragraph and also throughout, he makes much of the point that democracy is in favor of peace, a point which we know already from the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. Paragraph 7 is of special interest in this connection.

Reader:

> But it cannot be doubted that the majority of this council will never be minded to wage war, but rather always pursue and love peace. For besides that war will always cause them fear of losing their property and liberty, it is to be added, that war requires fresh expenditure, which they must meet, and also that their own children and relatives, though intent on their domestic cares, will be forced to turn their attention to war and go a-soldiering, whence they will never bring back anything but unpaid-for scars. (*PT* 7. 7)

LS: In other words, the majority of people are peaceful. They are intent on their domestic cares. Here is an image of some importance for a distinction which was made by Rousseau later on, and beyond, as you will see immediately. Now this is of course not simply true. We have seen democracies which were not peaceful, especially in classical antiquity. You know, that's not so simple. But there are societies in which that is true: the men concerned with their well being only, and without any concern for glory. That led to the distinction which Rousseau made between the bourgeois and the citizen. The bourgeois is this fellow, the private citizen, who cares[39] [primarily] for his private interest and only indirectly, namely, with a view to his private interest, for the public interest, whereas the citizen, the *citoyen*, is primarily concerned with the commonwealth. And that was in his opinion the difference between the modern men and the citizens of the ancient republics. Later on this concept of bourgeois as developed by Rousseau led via Hegel to Marx's concept of the bourgeois. That is the origin of that. The limited, merely private man who regards society as the means for the promotion of his private interest, that was the starting point, and Hegel, who plays a very great role in this development, gave the classic theoretical formulation for that. He says the bourgeois is animated by fear of violent death. The historical background was the *ancien régime*—mercenary soldiers. England is a good example, but the continental states too, [where] the subjects were not soldiers. In the ancient republics the citizens were soldiers. And the implication of Rousseau's doctrine was of course the citizen-soldier. You see Spinoza accepts this without any hesitation. Paragraph 8.

Reader:

[xvii] Georges Sorel (1847-1922) was a French syndicalist philosopher who influenced both Marxists and Fascists.

[xviii] There is a blank space in the transcript, perhaps indicating an inaudible word or phrase.

> There is another accession to the cause of peace and concord, which is also of great weight: I mean, that no citizen can have immovable property. Hence all will have nearly an equal risk in war. For all will be obliged, for the sake of gain, to practice trade, or lend money to one another, if, as formerly by the Athenians, a law be passed, forbidding to lend money at interest to any but inhabitants; and thus they will be engaged in business, which either is mutually involved, one man's with another's, or needs the same means for its furtherance. And thus the greatest part of this council will generally have one and the same mind about their common affairs and the arts of peace. For, as we said, every man defends another's cause, so far as he thinks thereby to establish his own. (*PT* 7. 8)

LS: Let us stop here. So in other words, commerce and banking must take the place of landed property as the substance of the commonwealth, that is a very important part of Spinoza's political teaching, and that will work for peace. The modern notion of the good society as it developed from the seventeenth century onward was[40] [in]separable from the very beginning from economics. The economic considerations always played a role, naturally, in classical doctrine too, but the emphasis was different. The emphasis was altogether on agriculture in the classical doctrines. The fight against the feudal society, which was also of course emphatically agricultural, led then to this emergence of the commercial society as the good society. That is one of the striking differences between Spinoza and earlier doctrines.

Let us look at paragraph 16. We must now unfortunately rush a bit.

Reader:

> It is undoubted, that citizens are more powerful, and, therefore, more independent, the larger and better fortified their towns are. For the safer the place is, in which they are, the better they can defend their liberty, and the less they need fear an enemy, whether without or within; and it is certain that the more powerful men are by their riches, the more they by nature study their own safety. (*PT* 7. 16)

LS:[41] In other words, the wealthy people and their self-interest is a more potent force for the good society than the others. That is all in the same spirit. Now let us see; in paragraph 26, beginning.

Reader:

> But the right of religion, or of worshipping God, no man can transfer to another. However, we have treated of this point at length in the last chapters of our *Theologico-Political Treatise*. (*PT* 7. 26)

LS: This is all we need. You see he refers here only to the last two chapters and not to these chapters—13, 14, 15—where he develops what he called the catholic religion, i.e., the civil religion. That is not relevant here for the discussion of monarchy, because there is to be no established religion there. Paragraph 27, let us read the beginning only of that.

Reader:

> And what we have written will, perhaps, be received with derision by those who limit to the populace only the vices which are inherent in all mortals; and use such phrases as,

> "the mob, if it is not frightened, inspires no little fear," and "the populace is either a humble slave, or a haughty master," and "it has no truth or judgment," etc. But all have one common nature. (*PT* 7. 27)

LS: Now let us stop here. Now this paragraph is partly literally based on a chapter in Machiavelli's *Discourses*, book 1, chapter 58.[42] It is a novel and surprising thesis, in both cases a seemingly pro-democratic [43][one], defending the multitude against the anti-democratic tradition. What Spinoza wants to say here is precisely [that] if all men are bad, kings and aristocrats too will be bad, and there is no reason to be restrictive regarding the multitude. The power of the individual's badness is much smaller in a democracy, as he will develop it. But Spinoza was, compared with almost all the philosophers preceding him, very favorable to democracy. But we must never forget these severe strictures on men at large, with the exception of the sages, which play such a great role in his teaching.

Paragraph 29 is very characteristic for his whole position. It is a very topical question: security. Spinoza goes so far as to say,[44] like a present-day liberal, [better] no secret councils than any danger to public liberty. Spinoza admits that non-democratic government can have greater secrecy of plans against foreign enemies, but he is willing to accept this. [Now] the beginning of paragraph 30.

Reader:

> Lastly, although no dominion, as far as I know, has ever been founded on all the conditions we have mentioned, yet from experience itself we shall be able to prove that this form of monarchy is the best, if we consider the causes of the preservation and overthrow of any dominion that is not barbarous. (*PT* 7. 30)

LS: That is very important. You remember [in] the first chapter he seems to say that he will only give institutions which have already existed and work. And now here, near the end of the section of monarchy, he says that his plan of a monarchy as given here has no precedent—at least he doesn't know of any precedent.[45] Only the experience we have of the passions can show us that this institution, if established, would work, but we have no experience of its actual working. And you see also this important limitation: a non-barbarous government. That is of course justified now by the chapter in which he established a standard, the standard being something in between the highest good, intellectual love of God, and what I call the subrational good. Rabbi ____, did you want to say something?

Student: If this was published after his death, what is the purpose of contradicting himself?

LS: That is not a deliberate contradiction. It is only that he overstated, I would say, the anti-utopianism. But there is no contradiction. I am sure this doesn't conceal anything important. His possible influence, and even the safety of the publishers was of course dependent on what they published. Is it not obvious? If certain doctrines are forbidden, not only the author is criminally responsible but also those who publish it long after his death. But more importantly, his influence on people after his death depends of course to some extent on his remaining tolerable in his teaching. Think of Machiavelli. Machiavelli's two great books were published after his

death, but they could not have been published if he had said in them everything he thought. That is no problem.

In this paragraph there is I think a contemporary allusion which he doesn't bring out,[46] [in his discussion of the] union of Aragon and Castile under Ferdinand and Isabella, which meant the complete destruction of the freedoms of Aragon, which was much freer. This, I believe, reminded Spinoza of the problem in his time, the marriage of William of Orange to a Stuart, the later Queen Mary.[xix] And Stuart England at that time was of course not a free country but on the verge of becoming an absolute monarchy, as was shown by James II very clearly. The friends of liberty in Holland were very distrustful of whether this personal union between the ruler of Holland and the ruler of England would not lead to the destruction of the Dutch liberties. That is, I think, the meaning of this seemingly purely antiquarian discussion about the situation in Spain. That is not very important.

Now let me see. So the main question, as far as I can see, is now answered in the *Political Treatise* to the extent to which it is answered there, and that is that there is a common denominator between the highest good constituting the truly rational life, and an average good which leads to what I call comfortable self-preservation. The union between the two makes it possible for Spinoza to reach a kind of working agreement between the wise and the vulgar. But this difficulty of the totally heterogeneous inspiration, virtue in the highest sense and comfortable self-preservation, remains.

I do not believe that we can pursue this subject in the way in which it ought to be pursued in this present course. It would lead much too far. I think you have to think about this problem.

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[1] Deleted "there is no – if"
[2] Deleted "after"
[3] Deleted "be"
[4] Deleted "now"
[5] Deleted "let us"
[6] Deleted "But if"
[7] Deleted "in"
[8] Deleted "these different tendencies"
[9] Deleted "says"
[10] Deleted "Therefore I suggest – I don't remember now what my suggestion was. Oh, I have a note."
[11] Deleted "how come"
[12] Deleted "They"
[13] Deleted "the"
[14] Deleted "[**LS**:] "And this end is nothing other than peace and security of life." [Student:] And therefore that domain is best…? [**LS**:] Read loud. [Student:] I'm confused. [**LS**:] Well, let me read it again. The beginning"
[15] Deleted "You know"
[16] Deleted "If"
[17] Deleted "is"
[18] Deleted "but"
[19] Deleted "When you"

[xix] Strauss may be confused in his history: Spinoza died in February 1677, while William of Orange would not marry the future queen Mary until November 1677. Admittedly, Spinoza was writing the *Political Treatise* at the very end of his life and the marriage may have been anticipated. James II would not become king of England until 1685.

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[20] Deleted "and"
[21] Moved "most"
[22] Deleted "[**LS**:] How does he translate that? [Student:] or have influence through wealth."
[23] Deleted "To what extent do these thinkers say the passions and irrational conduct"
[24] Deleted "they"
[25] Deleted "who are"
[26] Deleted it had very much to do.
[27] Deleted again.
[28] Deleted historical illustration.
[29] Deleted And.
[30] Deleted what is.
[31] Deleted "Because he would say"
[32] Deleted "I would say, is this"
[33] Deleted "the"
[34] Deleted "is it"
[35] Deleted "he says"
[36] Deleted "If all citizens are represented in the council, there will be a coincidence of the majority of the council and of the benefit of the majority of the people as he says. I am sorry, it was badly expressed."
[37] Deleted "In this way"
[38] Deleted "there is a question"
[39] Deleted "only"
[40] Deleted "not"
[41] Deleted "You see"
[42] Deleted "the excuse that"
[43] Deleted "chapter"
[44] Deleted "better"
[45] Deleted "He can only show by experience regarding"
[46] Deleted "namely this"

Session 16: no date

Leo Strauss: [in progress] —Dutch version of the *Political Treatise* which was based on a slightly different manuscript of Spinoza, corrected the text in the more recent edition. And I read to you according to this translation, "That the aristocratic regime must consist of a large number of patricians for the superiority of that regime and that it comes closer to being absolute than a monarchic regime, and that it is therefore preferable for the preservation of liberty."[i] So[1] this very title expresses that in Spinoza's opinion, aristocracy, whatever that may mean, is preferable to monarchy. The question is, of course: What does Spinoza understands by aristocracy? Does he mean by aristocracy what Plato and Aristotle meant by it and what was traditionally meant by it, or is it a new notion? Now we will see later on that to some extent he means the same. Well, the Latin term for aristocracy, the rule of the best—the *optimates* in Latin, which is derivative from *optimus*, the best—and that would refer to moral superiority too. But this is not simply what Spinoza means, as you see when we read the first paragraph. Now read it.

Reader:

> So far of monarchy. But now we will say, on what plan an aristocracy is to be framed, so that it may be lasting. We have defined an aristocratic dominion as that, which is held not by one man, but by certain persons chosen out of the multitude, whom we shall henceforth call patricians. I say expressly, "that which is held by certain persons chosen." For the chief difference between this and a democracy is, that the right of governing depends in an aristocracy on election only, but in a democracy for the most part on some right either congenital or acquired by fortune (as we shall explain in its place); and therefore, although in any dominion the entire multitude be received into the number of the patricians, provided that right of theirs is not inherited, and does not descend by some law to others, the dominion will for all that be quite an aristocracy, because none are received into the number of the patricians save by express election. But if these chosen persons were but two, each of them will try to be more powerful than the other, and from the too great power of each, the dominion will easily be split into two factions; and in like manner into three, four, or five factions, if three, four, or five persons were put into possession of it. But the factions will be the weaker, the more there are to whom the dominion was delegated. And hence it follows, that to secure the stability of an aristocracy, it is necessary to consider the proportionate size of the actual dominion, in order to determine the minimum number of patricians. (*PT* 8. 1)

LS: Here he speaks for the first time of the difference between aristocracy as he means it, and democracy. Now how did Aristotle understand the difference between aristocracy and democracy?

Student: Essentially the rule of the many and the poor as opposed to the rule of the best and the few.

LS: Well, in a democracy, formally of course every free-born man is a full citizen, but since the majority are poor and the vote goes by the majority, democracy is one in which the poor predominate. Poor does not mean paupers, naturally; it means people who have to earn a living.

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[i] Strauss's on-the-fly translation.

Aristocracy, to spell it out a bit more concretely, is a regime in which the old families, who derive their income, as we would say, from landed estates, predominate. That is what it means in more concrete terms. And the assumption is that these old families[2] and their way of owning wealth, of administering their wealth, is more conducive to decency than other forms. That is the point. This is completely absent from Spinoza. Spinoza sees the difference in something which has nothing to do[3] with numbers in[4] [themselves]. The question is: How do you become a member of the sovereign, i.e., a full active citizen? Answer: either by co-option—you as an individual are co-opted by the previously-existing citizen body, then it is an aristocracy; or you acquire full citizenship automatically on the basis of what he calls a hereditary right or some common law. For example, if the law is [that] everyone who has an income of more than, say, two thousand dollars a year is a citizen, there would be a universal law, and you are not elected as an individual. That is what Spinoza is suggesting. So that is a somewhat strange concept of aristocracy compared with the traditional notion. This we must keep in mind. This chapter and also the following chapters are based to some extent on the situation in the Low Countries in Spinoza's time, but I do not know to what extent all these peculiarities are based on Dutch precedent. That would be an interesting problem in itself.

Now after having stated the question [why] there must be a reasonably large number of patricians, he develops [the answer to] that in the sequel.[5] We limit ourselves only to the basic considerations and not the technical ones. Paragraph 3 we should read; here he develops why aristocracy is superior to monarchy. To repeat, aristocracy is[6] the rule of a minority for all practical purposes. The sovereign is composed of a minority of the inhabitants of a city. But this minority is not tiny—I think he says a proportion of one to twelve—so it is definitely a minority, but not a clique, not a small clique. And this is said to be superior to monarchy. Let us read that. Paragraph 3.

Student: What about where you become a citizen on the basis of money?

LS: That would be a democracy in his definition.

Student: Even though the numbers remain the same?

LS: Yes, that he says. Because then there would be a universal law: whoever owns, say, a million dollars or more is a full citizen. He is not, as an individual, elected. He could by his own industry, as we all know from our experience, earn a million dollars and then he is a citizen. He cannot be kept out by those in possession; that's the legal point. But Spinoza—we will see that when we come to his chapter on democracy—Spinoza is in favor of an all-inclusive democracy. Well, I say all-inclusive; I remember one of the nicest passages in Miss Perkin's book on Roosevelt (I don't know if any of you have read it), when she speaks about Roosevelt's "style."[ii] She wrote a statement for him which he was to read over the radio, and he made only one change. She had said "We want a society which is all-inclusive," and Roosevelt changed it [to read]: "We want a society where no one is left out." You see here the touch: the clear expression

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[ii] Frances Perkins (1880-1965) was Secretary of Labor under Franklin Roosevelt and the first woman to hold a cabinet position. Her book *The Roosevelt I Knew* was a sympathetic memoir of the period.

which everyone can understand. So Spinoza wants a society, a democracy in which no one is left out, as we shall see later. But here he is speaking only of an aristocracy. Paragraph 3.

Reader:

> The patricians are most commonly citizens of one city, which is the head of the whole dominion, so that the commonwealth or republic has its name from it, as once that of Rome, and now those of Venice, Genoa, etc. But the republic of the Dutch has its name from an entire province, whence it arises, that the subjects of this dominion enjoy a greater liberty. Now, before we can determine the foundations on which this aristocratic dominion ought to rest, we must observe a very great difference, which exists between the dominion which is conferred on one man and that which is conferred on a sufficiently large council. For, in the first place, the power of one man is very inadequate to support the entire dominion; but this no one, without manifest absurdity, can affirm of a sufficiently large council. For, in declaring the council to be sufficiently large, one at the same time denies, that it is inadequate to support the dominion. A king, therefore, is altogether in need of counsellors, but a council like this is not so in the least. In the second place, kings are mortal, but councils are everlasting. And so the power of the dominion which has once been transferred to a large enough council never reverts to the multitude. But this is otherwise in a monarchy, as we showed. Thirdly, a king's dominion is often on sufferance, whether from his minority, sickness, or old age, or from other causes; but the power of a council of this kind, on the contrary, remains always one and the same. In the fourth place, one man's will is very fluctuating and inconstant; and, therefore, in a monarchy, all law is, indeed, the explicit will of the king, but not every will of the king ought to be law; but this cannot be said of the will of a sufficiently numerous council. For since the council itself, as we have just shown, needs no counsellors, its every explicit will ought to be law. And hence we conclude, that the dominion conferred upon a large enough council is absolute, or approaches nearest to the absolute. For if there be any absolute dominion, it is, in fact, that which is held by an entire multitude. (*PT* 8. 3)

LS: [iii]—are concerned with the fact that in a monarchy the ruler is a so-called natural person, not a juridical person proper, a juridical person being a multitude. Therefore the king can express his will in any way in which a human being can express his will—by gestures, by words thrown out at random in a state of drunkenness, and then you must necessarily introduce such legal distinctions as the king in his private capacity and his public capacity, for example, by saying [that] only what the king says in the king's council, [7]and afterwards the royal seal is affixed, is the king's will. In a council that is a matter of course. No individual member of the council is sovereign, of course; only when [they are] duly assembled and reach a decision in that assembly in the proper way is it the rule of the sovereign. There is a clear cut distinction between the public will and any private will. In the case of monarchy that is not so clear. And also the other more practical points: naturally the council cannot be drunk as council, nor can it be swayed by a mistress or by any other of the debilities to which individuals, and therefore also individual

[iii] Presumably there was a break in the tape at this point.

kings, are subject. So there is no question that Spinoza was a republican. That is clear. Let us turn now to paragraph 6.

Student: His point [number] four Hobbes uses to prove exactly the opposite argument. Are not the councils more fluctuating and inconstant there?

LS: As regards the monarchy, Spinoza and Hobbes are at opposite poles, there is no question. But one must also[8] [point out] that Hobbes says in the preface, I believe to *De Cive*, that of all [the] things he has said in his political work, the only thing which is not demonstrated is the superiority of monarchy. That is only an argument of probability, as Hobbes puts it. But Hobbes surely preferred monarchy, there is no question; and Spinoza preferred republics, that is surely true. But this raises a general question regarding such studies as we are undertaking: How important is that difference? That it is of immense practical importance is obvious, but the theoretical differences may not be equally great. For example, there were many people in Hobbes's and Spinoza's age who were either republicans or monarchists. But regarding the theoretical foundations there may be a greater agreement between Hobbes and Spinoza than between Hobbes and the other monarchists and Spinoza and the other republicans. One must always keep both things in mind. Now let us turn to paragraph 6.

Reader:

> But the commons need not apprehend any danger of a hateful slavery from this form of dominion, merely because it is conferred on the council absolutely. For the will of so large a council cannot be so much determined by lust as by reason; because men are drawn asunder by an evil passion, and cannot be guided, as it were, by one mind, except so far as they desire things honorable, or that have at least an honorable appearance. (*PT* 8. 6)

LS: Hah! Don't you see? The last phrase cancels out the rest of the paragraph. There is nothing which cannot be given the appearance of honesty by sufficiently clever crooks. That is the old story we have seen in Spinoza's discussion of democracy before, that democracy is essentially rational because the multitude cannot be united in anything except the rational. You remember that. We had quite a few passages in the *Theologico-Political Treatise,* and that of course is not true. But it only indicates Spinoza's desire to prove the higher rationality of aristocracy. This argument is not a valid argument.[9]

Student: I'm not sure that it isn't valid, because if this isn't valid I don't see any other grounds for this solution to the problem of democracy.

LS: Well, look here, for example. The other points are of some importance: that in a republic the deliberations and decisions are necessarily made in legal form, because that is the only way in which a juridical person can act. Do you see that? It is impossible to have a decision of the sovereign council which does not take place in legal form. In a monarchy that is not indispensable.

Student: Isn't the legal form the rationality of democracy?

LS: You can have the most abominable laws legally passed.

Student: But to pass them, they must be agreed upon.

LS: But upon what terrible things can people agree? Let us get one thing straight. There is a thought which is very powerful throughout the tradition, and quite rightly, and that is this: that the mere legal form is in itself a great boon because it is some limitation on complete arbitrariness. But it is not the whole story. For example, when you read some studies about the Nazi regime, and the amazing thing is that the most terrible things were done against the Nazi laws. The legal form would have been a limitation. I have forgotten now quite a few of the amazing details. Oh yes, I remember, I discussed it once in class, in the examples given by Lon Fuller of Harvard Law School in a discussion with a lawyer from Oxford, in which he gave some specimens where the Nazi law would have been a protection even for Jews, compared with what was done on the basis of mere arbitrariness.[iv] Law, however absurd and impossible it may be, is a limitation. And if, therefore, the sovereign himself, by being a council and not an individual, must necessarily have legal forms, from this point of view a republic is more legal than a monarchy is. And[10] the objection raised by monarchs [in former times] was this: law is a limitation; it prevents those quick decisions which cannot be easily made because of the cumbersome forms of law. This was the greatest monarchical objection to the notion of the rule of law. You can see it in every point. For example, the protection people had against entire arbitrariness regarding freedom of thought, expressing their views. As long as the procedure is legal, there is a protection. Proof has to be given [first], that the author said it, and second, that he meant it. But in the moment the place of law is taken by suspicion or terror, i.e., by lawlessness, there is no hope for anyone. It is not very much, I grant you that, mere law, because the content of a law can be terrible. But it is also not negligible. Therefore the first definition you find in Plato and so [on, and] even in Aristotle, for what is just—the first definition is the legal, i.e., in legal forms: *díkaion* = *nómimon*.[v] And Aristotle in his wisdom says of course immediately "somehow," because the just of course is not simply the legal but that which corresponds to a just law. That is a greater question. But even this minimum which law as law gives is a boon. Yes?

Student: I don't understand the point you made about "at least an honorable appearance."

LS: There is absolutely nothing, however dishonorable, which cannot be given an honorable appearance by sufficiently clever men. That you see every day. You only have to read a speech of this fellow in Hungary, how he presents the executions there.[vi]

[iv] Lon Fuller (1902-1978) was an important legal philosopher who wrote about the relationship of law and morality. The Oxford professor was likely H.L.A. Hart (1907-1992), a frequent interlocutor with Fuller on the debate between positivistic and natural law. The Hart-Fuller debate on morality and law was published in the *Harvard Law Review* in 1958.

[v] Plato, *Republic* 358e-362c; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1129a and *Politics* 1287a.

[vi] Possibly a reference to Mátyás Rákosi, the totalitarian de facto ruler of communist Hungary until 1956. About 350,000 government officials and public intellectuals were purged during his time in office. Alternatively, a reference to János Kádár, General Secretary at the time this course was given, known for "softer" rhetoric than Rákosi.

Student: I thought he might have meant that a king, being sole sovereign by himself, could actually be his own council, but in a council you have to give public reasons for what you are doing.

LS: No, but Spinoza means something very simple. In the seventeenth century the continental lawyers discussed this nice question. If the prince, completely drunk, comes out of his house and sees a fellow and he says to some guard accompanying him: Shoot that fellow down immediately. A command of the prince has to be obeyed. Now something like this is not possible in a republic—it is at least much more difficult that the majority of the council should have the wish at the same time to do such a thing. And in addition, this would never be a decision if it were not done in the assembly, which means also ordinarily in that room provided for the assembly for decisions and duly entered by the secretary. Of course in monarchies you had that. In England you have the distinction of the king in his private person and the king in his public person. But kings themselves didn't like that; that was imposed on[11] [them] by the parliament. There is something to that.

Student: Also in an aristocracy there would be more concern with appearances even if they would like to see something like that.

LS: They are also more in need of having a popular following than the king would. No, I think this argument does not go very deep, but it is not negligible. And also think of the question of minority, or when the king is incapacitated. What shall happen? And questions which arise even in a constitutional republic—you remember the case when President Eisenhower was ill.[vii] Even there, but in a much lesser degree of course, because he is only the head of the executive, and the legislative assembly is independent of that.

Now let us go to the next point, paragraph 10, which is more difficult to understand.

Reader:

> Furthermore, for this same reason, that all but the patricians are foreigners—

LS: Namely, strictly understood they are not citizens. They are not members of the sovereign body.

Reader:

> it cannot be without danger to the whole dominion, that the lands and houses and the whole soil should remain public property, and be let to the inhabitants at a yearly rent. For the subjects having no part in the dominion would easily, in bad times, all forsake their cities, if they could carry where they pleased what goods they possess. And, therefore, lands and farms are not to be let, but sold to the subjects, yet on condition that they pay every year an aliquot part of the year's produce, etc., as is done in Holland. (PT 8. 10)

[vii] There were three occasions in which President Eisenhower was incapacitated: a heart attack (1955), a bowel obstruction (1956), and a mild stroke (1957). Vice President Nixon carried out certain responsibilities during these periods but never assumed formal presidential authority.

LS: Do you remember—why does he make this remark? That there should be a real property in an aristocracy.

Student: The reverse of a monarchy.

LS: Yes. In a monarchy there should be no real property. And here it is indispensable because it is the only compensation the large mass of people has for being excluded from citizenship. Paragraph 12. I think to understand that, you will have to read also paragraph 11.

Reader:

> These points considered, I proceed to the foundations on which the supreme council should rest and be established. We have shown that, in a moderate-sized dominion, this council ought to have about five thousand members. (*PT* 8. 11)

LS: You see it is not so small.

Reader:

> And so we must look for means of preventing the dominion from gradually getting into fewer hands, and of insuring, on the contrary, that the number of members be increased in proportion to the growth of the dominion itself; and, next, that between the patricians, equality be as far as possible maintained; and, further, that there may be speed and expedition in their counsels, and that they tend to the general good; and, lastly, that the power of the patricians or council exceed the power of the multitude, yet so that the multitude suffer no harm thereby.
>
> 12. But jealousy causes a great difficulty in maintaining our first point. For men are, as we have said, by nature enemies, so that however they be associated, and bound together by laws, they still retain their nature. And hence I think it is, that democracies change into aristocracies, and these at length into monarchies. For I am fully persuaded that most aristocracies were formerly democracies. For when a given multitude, in search of fresh territories, has found and cultivated them, it retains, as a whole, its equal right of dominion, because no man gives dominion to another spontaneously. But although every one of them thinks it fair, that he should have the same right against another that that other has against him, he yet thinks it unfair, that the foreigners that join them should have equal right in the dominion with themselves, who sought it by their own toil, and won it at the price of their own blood. And this not even the foreigners themselves deny, for, of course, they migrate thither, not to hold dominion, but for the benefit of their own private business, and are quite satisfied if they are but allowed the liberty of transacting that business in safety. But meanwhile the multitude is augmented by the influx of foreigners, who gradually acquire the national manners, until at last they are distinguished by no other difference than that of incapacity to get office; and while their number daily increases, that of the citizens, on the contrary, is by many causes diminished. For families often die out, and some persons are disqualified for their crimes, and a great many are driven by domestic poverty to

> neglect affairs of state, and meanwhile the more powerful aim at nothing else, but to govern alone; and thus the dominion is gradually limited to a few, and at length by faction to one. And here we might add other causes that destroy dominions of this sort; but as they are well known, I pass them by, and proceed now to state the laws by which this dominion, of which we are treating, ought to be maintained. (*PT* 8. 11, 12)

LS: How would you phrase the general point made in this paragraph? I think that is a very interesting paragraph, because it states with great clarity one of the most important[12] elements of politics, which is of course very powerful in this country too. The whole notion underlying immigration laws, even today, and the ideas underlying such concepts as the Daughters of the American Revolution[viii] and the special reverence given to the descendants of the Pilgrim fathers. All this is implied here. That corresponds to the common practice of mankind, but explicit statements on this point, of this theoretical clarity, are rare. Spinoza spells out in my opinion what was alluded to in the first chapter of Machiavelli's *Discourses*, where this point is implied but not developed. You see the important point. There are opinions to which he refers. Everyone regards it as equitable that he has the same right on someone else as someone else has on him. And he believes this is unjust, that foreigners should have the same rights as the old settlers. These are *doxai*, opinions, but politically so powerful that you cannot disregard them in any sensible political doctrine. But ultimately what Spinoza says is this: the primary political order is democratic. A tribe of men settle the territory, and there is no good reason for establishing inequalities, except the natural and temporary ones. Someone has qualities of leadership, he would be elected as a leader but his son may very well be an ordinary fellow, this goes without saying; but basically a democratic society. But then he shows how out of such a society, in a perfectly unblamable manner, a restrictive society emerges, namely, foreigners come in, they have not grown with the country, they have not fought the savage beasts, made it habitable; and it is natural they should have lesser rights. This leads then to difficulties, as Spinoza explains, because the old settlers may diminish in numbers, the newcomers may be more numerous, and then difficulties arise. But basically democracy is the most natural regime, as he has said more than once, and which is also here implied. Paragraph 24.

Reader:

> 24. The syndics—

LS: They are certain officers of the government. We cannot go into the technical details here.

Reader:

> and other ministers of state are to have no salary, but such emoluments, that they cannot maladminister affairs of state without great loss to themselves.

[viii] The Daughters of the American Revolution, founded in 1890, is a descent-based volunteer organization. According to the DAR's website, any woman 18 years or older "who can prove lineal descent from a patriot of the American Revolution is eligible to join." The activities of the organization include historic preservation, education, and patriotic efforts.

LS: That is always a point. No trust in human honesty. Institutions which enforce the minimum degree of decency which is required.

Reader:

> For we cannot doubt that it is fair, that the ministers of this kind of dominion should be awarded a recompense for their time, since the commons are the majority in this dominion, and the patricians look after their safety, while they themselves have no trouble with affairs of state, but only with their own private ones. But since, on the other hand, no man defends another's cause, save in so far as he thereby hopes to establish his own interest, things must, of necessity, be so ordered that the ministers, who have charge of affairs of state, should most pursue their own interest, when they are most watchful for the general good. (*PT* 8. 24)

LS: No one will defend the case of someone else unless he believes by this very fact he improves his own affairs. Charity, we can say, is impossible, at least for all practical purposes. Therefore we must always have a guarantee for good conduct in the selfish interest of the officeholder. That is a thought which goes through the whole thought of Spinoza. We read a few more passages. In paragraph 31, which deals again with the superiority of aristocracy.

Reader:

> The emoluments of the senators should be of such a kind, that their profit is greater from peace than from war. And therefore let there be awarded to them a hundredth or a fiftieth part of the merchandise exported abroad from the dominion, or imported into it from abroad. For we cannot doubt, that by this means they will, as far as they can, preserve peace, and never desire to protract war. And from this duty not even the senators themselves, if any of them are merchants, ought to be exempt; for such an immunity cannot be granted without great risk to trade, as I think no one is ignorant. Nay, on the contrary, it must be by law ordained, that no senator or ex-senator may fill any military post; and further, that no one may be declared general or praetor, which officers we said (Sec. 9) were to be only appointed in time of war, whose father or grandfather is a senator, or has held the dignity of senator within two years. Which laws we cannot doubt, that the patricians outside the senate will defend with all their might: and so it will be the case, that the senators will always have more profit from peace than from war, and will, therefore, never advise war, except the utmost need of the dominion compels them. But it may be objected to us, that on this system, if, that is, syndics and senators are to be allowed so great profits, an aristocracy will be as burdensome to the subjects as any monarchy. But not to mention that royal courts require larger expenditure, and are yet not provided in order to secure peace, and that peace can never be bought too dear; it is to be added, first, that all that under a monarchy is conferred on one or a few, is here conferred upon very many. Next kings and their ministers do not bear the burden of the dominion with the subjects, but under this form of dominion it is just the reverse; for the patricians, who are always chosen from the rich, bear the largest share of the weight of the commonwealth. Lastly, the burdens of a monarchy spring not so much from its king's expenditure, as from its secret policy.

LS: He refers here to old power politics, cabinet politics, leading to wars. You know, this kind of thing.

Reader:

> For those burdens of a dominion, that are imposed on the citizens in order to secure peace and liberty, great though they be, are yet supported and lightened by the usefulness of peace. What nation ever had to pay so many and so heavy taxes as the Dutch? Yet it not only has not been exhausted, but, on the contrary, has been so mighty by its wealth, that all envied its good fortune.

LS: This, by the way, expresses a rather common opinion of the seventeenth-eighteenth century, and this argument plays a very great role in Montesquieu. Republics can tax their citizens much more highly than monarchs can because there is this agreement of interest between rulers and subjects which does not exist in a monarchy.

Reader:

> If therefore the burdens of a monarchy were imposed for the sake of peace, they would not oppress the citizens; but, as I have said, it is from the secret policy of that sort of dominion, that the subjects faint under their lord; that is, because the virtue of kings counts for more in time of war than in time of peace, and because they, who would reign by themselves, ought above all to try and have their subjects poor; not to mention other things, which that most prudent Dutchman V. H. formerly remarked, because they do not concern my design, which is only to describe the best state of every kind of dominion.[ix] (PT 8. 31)

LS: So you see there is no question regarding Spinoza's republicanism. And here this argument which played such a role: the monarchies are warlike and republics are peaceful. Well, the background of that argument was that the monarchies were originally feudal monarchies, i.e., warlike. The class of warriors, of knights, was decisive, whereas republics were based chiefly on the commercial and industrial classes. And this led then to the notion that with the abolition of feudalism and with the predominance of industrialism, wars would disappear—this hope, expressed since the eighteenth century until Spencer's famous opposition of the industrial and military societies.[x] You know that played a very great role in the ideology of the First World War: the peaceful republics of the West against the military monarchies of Central Europe, and the Czarist Russia was regarded as only a kind of appendage of the peaceful republics of the West. I don't say that this was entirely nonsense, but it is of course much more complicated, and the complications have been very powerfully pointed out in the first articles of the *Federalist Papers*. You know, Hamilton stated[13] very forcefully that the historical evidence, at least up to that time, did not prove that republics were more peaceful. Think of [what might have been] the[14] biggest war in antiquity, between Rome and Carthage: [it] was a war between two republics, to say nothing of other points. But Spinoza certainly did not see any difficulty here. Yes?

[ix] V. H. refers to Pieter Van den Hove, better known as Pieter de la Court, a Dutch political theorist roughly contemporary to Spinoza. He was an avid republican and advocate of free trade.

[x] Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) was a Victorian era political theorist and philosopher, perhaps best known for coining the term "survival of the fittest." He is sometimes considered the progenitor of social Darwinism.

Student: Just one remark about his design, to describe the best state.

LS: Yes, that's an important point.

Student: This was mentioned last time. The seeming contradiction between his original statement of his purpose and his later statement. Does he mean that these paradigms of aristocracies and monarchies have never in fact been? Or if they are to perfect, they should follow his lines?

LS: You have raised more than one question in your question. In the first place, he had to establish a standard by which he could say which is the best monarchy, the best aristocracy, and so on. Now we [have] clarified that, at least to some extent. Let us call it comfortable self-preservation.[15] Now secondly I think Spinoza would say, at least regarding aristocracy, that what he said is approximated by the Dutch Republic, meaning, if there were certain improvements made, the Dutch Republic would be something like that, as we shall see[16] in the sequel. In other words, Spinoza's view, I think, is ultimately not different from that of Aristotle, contrary to its first appearance, namely, that all the elements of the best monarchy, the best aristocracy, best democracy exist and have been proven to work by actual practice. But what has not been done sufficiently is to put all these good and workable elements together. And to that extent there is a certain difference between theory and practice. I think that would be a simple solution to what he means. He overstated the case somewhat in the first chapter.

Student: But you can trivialize the elements. Certainly the elements of everything exist.

LS: No, no. I mean specific institutions. For example, this and this form of property, this and this form of judicature. The really significant elements of course, not the presence of human beings,[17] [or] governors and governed. That would be trivial indeed.

Student: No, I meant even certain institutions can be seen dispersed throughout the world.

LS: If it would amount to this, then Spinoza would justly be blamed of a very great error.

Student: Do you think that this Dutch Republic paradigm . . .

LS: Well, I have not made that study, which is simply [an] empirical study. And one must not take of course what present-day historians say, who have an entirely different point of view, but you have to take what the contemporary Dutch[man says], especially of that party to which Spinoza belonged, the republic aristocratic party, and this fellow whom he quotes, VH, van Hooten. That was a statement of a republican.[xi] Van Hooten would have to be consulted. The more interesting problem which he raises here is this. He says he will present in each case—monarchy, aristocracy, democracy—the best form. But he does much more, of course; he compares the best forms with each other; and at least as far as the best form of monarchy and the best form of aristocracy is concerned, he gives the edge to the best form of aristocracy, not the best form of monarchy. Yes?

[xi] See note ix above about Pieter Van den Hove.

Student: He says the patricians are always chosen from the rich.

LS: Does he not say the senators? Yes, the patricians, you are right.

Student: Why does he say something like this?

LS: Well, that was a rather common view, based on a simple commonsensical consideration. There is nothing deep in that. Something very practical.

Student: Can't others be elected, then?

LS: Legally it would be possible. But why would it not be possible in fact? A very simple consideration?

Student: They don't have the time.

LS: Sure. Very simple thing.

Student: I mean somebody like—I see, it isn't a legal consideration.

LS: No, no. A man who has to work the whole day for keeping body and soul together has no time for attending very frequent assemblies. And this thing was changed in modern times by remuneration for deputies, congressmen, or whatever you call it. If such stipends were not given, a poor man could never run for Congress, naturally. That was therefore one of the major instruments for democratization, remuneration for the representative; without that it would be absolutely impossible. There could be another way, they could put together money to send, say, twenty thousand men,[18] [send] it together for their representative. That is of course also possible. But the simpler way would be remuneration. Mr. ____?

Student: You mentioned that Spinoza discusses minority groups, the interests of those from other nations.

LS: Do you know about anyone else who discusses this? I don't know. I think it was always taken for granted. For example, in Plato and Aristotle it is understood [that] there will always be resident aliens. And the naturalization, as we call it now, was always a very complicated thing, and you have many traces—for example, in the *Republic*, the personnel: Cephalus, his sons Polemarchus, Lysias, these are resident aliens. They got, by the way, into very great troubles and had much less than ordinary legal protection later on under the Thirty.[xii] This family was practically extirpated; only the orator Lysias survived. Well, in a big commercial town, as Athens was, in everyday life you didn't notice anything, as you see from the scene in the *Republic*. But clearly [they had] no access to office. And that was of course a cherished good, to be a full citizen.

[xii] The Thirty Tyrants, an oligarchy imposed by Sparta, held power in Athens for a short time following the Peloponnesian War.

Aristotle discusses this in various passages in the *Politics*, what the cities did. The normal rule was [this]: only a son of a citizen father and a citizen mother was a citizen. But sometimes after wars in which many citizens were lost and the number of citizens had shrunk, they enlarged them and said: Well, anyone who has one citizen parent, either father or mother, will be a citizen. But later on, when the citizen body was again full-blooded, they retracted that. In other words, restrictions against foreigners, and very great difficulty of access to citizenship I would say, was the ordinary practice in former times—which could go very well with liberality in permitting resident aliens to live and do business and this kind of thing, that is another matter. But citizen rights were a different story.

Of course the situation in America, which was, or became at least from a certain moment on, an emphatically immigrant country, up to a certain time, is not the rule. I would say the fact that it was not discussed, and the justice of this procedure was not discussed, was due to the fact that it was universally taken for granted. Partly in the ancient times it had to do with the fact so powerfully pointed out by Fustel de Coulanges that the city was in a way a religious community,[xiii] each with its familial ancestral cult. It was not like entering a trade union or something of this kind. This term "open society" and "closed society" which was introduced by Bergson and later on misused in various ways—the concrete question is, I think, just that: whether the requirements for admission to citizenship are negligible or very significant. [xiv] That is I think the difference for practical purposes between an open and a closed society, and those who believe they can abolish this whole difficulty would have to say either a world state, by which every human being by virtue of being a human being is a citizen of that, or else simply say one or two years residence in a country—the mere fact of residence—establishes the right to citizenship. But no one ever thought of that.

Student: One implication of this is a lessening of pride in citizenship, I should think.

LS: Whatever is as easy of access as air is despised by us foolish humans. Although one should praise air very highly; we could not live one moment without that. Surely, what is had for the asking is not as dear. That is one of the difficulties of modern democracy. If you are the one hundred millionth member of the sovereign, that's almost as if you had no say whatever. But if the sovereign consists of fifty people and you are one of them, that is more valuable. And the electoral apathy of course stems from that: What does my vote mean? You know? It is simply foolish to minimize these grave difficulties.

Yes, this point: peace. The peaceful republics versus the warlike monarchies, that played a very great role, and you see Spinoza raises no difficulty in that. Now a few more points. Paragraph 46.

Reader:

[xiii] See session 11, n. xiv.
[xiv] Henri-Louis Bergson (1859-1941) was an influential French philosopher in the first half of the twentieth century. He was an opponent of strict rationalism, in favor of an *élan vital*. The term open society is from his work *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932). Strauss's comment about misuse is no doubt a reference to Karl Popper and his work *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945). Strauss strongly disagreed with Popper's reading of Plato.

> Matters concerning religion we have set forth at sufficient length in our *Theologico-Political Treatise*. Yet certain points we then omitted, of which it was not there the place to treat; for instance, that all the patricians must be of the same religion, that is, of that most simple and general religion—

LS: Most catholic. That's more literal.

Reader:

> which in that treatise we described. For it is above all to be avoided, that the patricians themselves should be divided into sects, and show favour, some to this, and others to that, and thence become mastered by superstition, and try to deprive the subjects of the liberty of speaking out their opinions. In the second place, though everyone is to be given liberty to speak out his opinion, yet great conventicles are to be forbidden. And, therefore, those that are attached to another religion are, indeed, to be allowed to build as many temples as they please; yet these are to be small, and limited to a certain standard of size, and on sites at some little distance one from another. But it is very important, that the temples consecrated to the national religion should be large and costly, and that only patricians or senators should be allowed to administer its principal rites, and thus that patricians only be suffered to baptize, celebrate marriages, and lay on hands, and that in general they be recognized as the priests of the temples and the champions and interpreters of the national religion. But, for preaching, and to manage the church treasury and its daily business, let some persons be chosen from the commons by the senate itself, to be, as it were, the senate's deputies, and, therefore, bound to render it account of everything. (*PT* 8. 46)

LS: So you see, a strict state religion, literally. The rulers are the religious leaders of the community, and the religion is defined as what we have seen in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*—you know, the seven dogmas (you remember that?) subject to interpretation by everyone, so that not much more than mere formulas, empty of content, remain. But there must be a public religion in an aristocracy, and, I would add, although I have no evidence for that, in a democracy.[19] In a monarchy there should be no established religion, but in an aristocracy there must be. Now aristocracy and democracy are much closer together than either [is] with monarchy, because the two are republics and the other is not a republic: complete freedom as far as speaking is concerned, with the natural reservations indicated in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. For example, if someone would say "There is no God," that would be impossible. [But] he can call matter God; that is all right. So there are certain limitations which would still be there. Also the other religions have definitely a lower status, as is clearly indicated. They can't have these beautiful temples which the state religion alone has.

A few more points that have to do with the subject of this paragraph. Paragraph 48.

Reader:

> Those, whom the law compels to take an oath, will be much more cautious of perjury, if they are bidden to swear by the country's safety and liberty and by the supreme council, than if they are told to swear by God. For he who swears by God, gives as surety some

> private advantage to himself, whereof he is judge; but he, who by his oath gives as surety his country's liberty and safety, swears by what is the common advantage of all, whereof he is not judge, and if he perjures himself, thereby declares that he is his country's enemy. (*PT* 8. 48)

LS: In other words, you see how secular this Spinozistic state is. If it is a monarchy, no established religion; if it is a republic, an established religion, but of this extremely comprehensive kind. And in addition, in this practically important point of oaths: no religious oaths. Let us read finally the last paragraph.

Reader:

> Academies, that are founded at the public expense, are instituted not so much to cultivate men's natural abilities as to restrain them.[20]

LS: Academies mean universities, of course. A harsh word.

Reader:

> But in a free commonwealth arts and sciences will be best cultivated to the full, if everyone that asks leave is allowed to teach publicly, and that at his own cost and risk. But these and the like points I reserve for another place. For here I determined to treat only such matters as concern an aristocratic dominion only. (*PT* 8. 49)

LS: It seems that Spinoza wanted to treat of that in the part of the book which was not written, i.e., in the section on democracy, but as we have it this is the only remark dealing with education, either intellectual or moral. And that is a very striking difference from Plato and Aristotle. For Plato and Aristotle the bulk, one can say, of their political works is devoted to the question of education. That is particularly clear in the *Republic*, when you compare the proportion of pages devoted to education, intellectual and/or moral on the one hand, and institutions on the other. It is also true of Aristotle, in substance at any rate. In Spinoza this is all we have. Why? What takes the place of education in Spinoza?

Student: Institutions.

LS: The institutions, sure. The mechanism, the prudently excogitated institutions which deliver the goods automatically, instead of this unreliable thing, education, which works and does not work, as no one can foresee the consequences.

Student: What does he mean by that remark? That the academies restrain man's natural . . .

LS: That they do in fact. He doesn't say that they should do that. You can also say it is a plea for private universities, and we people at the University of Chicago would be greatly pleased with that part of the statement. But Spinoza, I am afraid, would also include private universities which are somehow dependent on the founders of such universities or on the trustees, taking the place of the founders. What he has in mind is that anyone who feels he has to teach something should put an advertisement in the *Tribune* or the *Sun Times* and say: I am going to teach and I take the full risk, and that is that. And one would not be subject to any authority, state or board of

trustees. That is practically fantastic, naturally. But one must also say that the criticism of universities is not entirely unfounded. If there are strict state universities as you had them in Central Europe, there is surely a line they have to follow. For example, it was practically impossible to criticize the institution of monarchy in a monarchy. But you can say some such limitations are inevitable everywhere. Spinoza was offered once a professorship in Heidelberg, and that was a very strange thing because he was not a Christian, after all, and this was an institution under the Calvinist Elector of the Palatinate. And Spinoza declined. The correspondence is preserved. It is not uninteresting. He knew he would get into troubles immediately if he were to come to the university, so he declined.

Student: Was this before or after the *Theologico-Political Treatise*?

LS: I believe after the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. You would only have to look up the letters. But since I do not know the year—[xv]

Reader:

> 14. And these are the things, which touch the foundations of the dominion. But that its condition is better than that of the aristocracy, which is called after one city only, I conclude from this, namely, that the patricians of every city, after the manner of human desire, will be eager to keep, and if possible increase their right, both in their city and in the senate; and therefore will try, as far as possible, to attract the multitude to themselves, and consequently to make a stir in the dominion by good deeds rather than by fear, and to increase their own number; because the more numerous they are, the more senators they will choose out of their own council (Sec. 6), and hence the more right (Sec. 6) they will possess in the dominion. Nor is it an objection, that while every city is consulting its own interest and suspecting the rest, they more often quarrel among themselves, and waste time in disputing. For if, while the Romans are debating, Saguntum is lost: on the other hand, while a few are deciding everything in conformity with their own passions only, liberty and the general good are lost. For men's natural abilities are too dull to see through everything at once; but by consulting, listening, and debating, they grow more acute, and while they are trying all means, they at last discover those which they want, which all approve, but no one would have thought of in the first instance. But if anyone retorts, that the dominion of the Dutch has not long endured without a count or one to fill his place, let him have this reply, that the Dutch thought, that to maintain their liberty it was enough to abandon their count, and to behead the body of their dominion, but never thought of remoulding it, and left its limbs, just as they had been first constituted, so that the county of Holland has remained without a count, like a headless body, and the actual dominion has lasted on without the name. And so it is no wonder that most of its subjects have not known, with whom the authority of the dominion lay. And even had this been otherwise, yet those who actually held dominion were far too few to govern the multitude and suppress their powerful adversaries. Whence it has come to pass, that the latter have often been able to plot against them with impunity, and at last to overthrow them. And so the

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[xv] There was a break in the tape at this point. The invitation was extended in 1673, three years after the treatise. According to Nadler's biography, the elector was most likely unaware of the book (which had been published anonymously), and invited Spinoza on the basis of his earlier work on Descartes. See Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 311-14.

> sudden overthrow of the said republic has not arisen from a useless waste of time in debates, but from the misformed state of the said dominion and the fewness of its rulers.
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> 15. This aristocracy in the hands of several cities is also preferable to the other, because it is not necessary, as in the first described, to provide against its whole supreme council being overpowered by a sudden attack, since no time or place is appointed for its meeting. Moreover, powerful citizens in this dominion are less to be feared. For where several cities enjoy liberty, it is not enough for him, who is making ready his way to dominion, to seize one city, in order to hold dominion over the rest. And, lastly, liberty under this dominion is common to more. For where one city reigns alone, there the advantage of the rest is only so far considered, as suits that reigning city. (*PT* 9. 14, 15)

LS: That goes in the direction of the Federalist argument but is much less rich in detail than that later argument. It is also interesting that there is no reference to the advantage of federalism from the point of view of defense, that an alliance of cities is larger and potentially militarily more powerful than a single city—all these kinds of things which are mentioned in Montesquieu.

Now the next chapter is much more important, and we have to take up quite a few things because in the tenth chapter he deals with the reasons why he made the suggestion[21] regarding aristocracy,[22] in chapter 8[23] especially. Now let us read only the beginning of chapter 10.

Reader:[xvi]

> Having explained and made proof of the foundations of both kinds of aristocracy, it remains to inquire whether by reason of any fault they are liable to be dissolved or changed into another form. The primary cause, by which dominions of this kind are dissolved, is that, which that most acute Florentine observes in his "Discourses on Livy" (Bk. iii. Chap. I.), namely, that like a human body, "a dominion has daily added to it something that at some time or other needs to be remedied." And so, he says, it is necessary for something occasionally to occur, to bring back the dominion to that first principle, on which it was in the beginning established. And if this does not take place within the necessary time, its blemishes will go on increasing, till they cannot be removed, but with the dominion itself. And this restoration, he says, may either happen accidentally, or by the design and forethought of the laws or of a man of extraordinary virtue. And we cannot doubt, that this matter is of the greatest importance, and that, where provision has not been made against this inconvenience, the dominion will not be able to endure by its own excellence, but only by good fortune; and on the other hand that, where a proper remedy has been applied to this evil, it will not be possible for it to fall by its own fault, but only by some inevitable fate, as we shall presently show more clearly. The first remedy, that suggested itself for this evil, was to appoint every five years a supreme dictator for one or two months, who should have the right to inquire, decide, and make ordinances concerning the acts of the senators and of every official, and thereby to bring back the dominion to its first principle. But he who studies to avoid the inconveniences, to which a dominion is liable, must apply remedies that suit its nature, and can be derived

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[xvi] It is unclear from the transcript where the reading in the classroom began and ended.

> from its own foundations; otherwise in his wish to avoid Charybdis he falls upon Scylla. It is, indeed, true that all, as well rulers as ruled, ought to be restrained by fear of punishment or loss, so that they may not do wrong with impunity or even advantage; but, on the other hand, it is certain, that if this fear becomes common to good and bad men alike, the dominion must be in the utmost danger. Now as the authority of a dictator is absolute, it cannot fail to be a terror to all, especially if, as is here required, he were appointed at a stated time, because in that case every ambitious man would pursue this office with the utmost energy; and it is certain that in time of peace virtue is thought less of than wealth, so that the more haughty a man he is, the more easily he will get office. And this perhaps is why the Romans used to make a dictator at no fixed time, but under pressure of some accidental necessity. Though for all that, to quote Cicero's words, "the tumour of a dictator was displeasing to the good." And to be sure, as this authority of a dictator is quite royal, it is impossible for the dominion to change into a monarchy without great peril to the republic, although it happen for ever so short a time. Furthermore, if no fixed time were appointed for creating a dictator, no notice would be paid to the interval between one dictator and another, which is the very thing that we said was most to be observed; and the whole thing would be exceedingly vague, and therefore easily neglected. Unless, then, this authority of a dictator be eternal and fixed, and therefore impossible to be conferred on one man without destroying the form of dominion, the dictatorial authority itself, and consequently the safety and preservation of the republic will be very uncertain. (*PT* 10. 1)

LS: He means of course the Roman institution of dictatorship, which as you know was a republic[an] office and was not what is now called dictatorship, and he rejects this in favor of giving emergency powers to the ordinary authorities. This in my opinion was also the view of Machiavelli himself, but Machiavelli does not elaborate it for a very special reason which has to do with the technique of his works. Machiavelli presents his criticism of Roman institutions only in a very subdued language, but it becomes clear when you study the chapter on dictatorship that he did not believe this was a wise institution. If you are interested in the question, I have a note on this in my book on Machiavelli, page 319.[xvii] But let us now come to the crucial issue. Paragraph 4, the beginning.

Reader:

> However, this authority of the syndics will only be able to secure the preservation of the form of the dominion, and thus to prevent the laws from being broken, or anyone from gaining by transgressing; but will by no means suffice to prevent the growth of vices, which cannot be forbidden by law, such as those into which men fall from excess of leisure, and from which the ruin of a dominion not uncommonly follows. For men in time of peace lay aside fear, and gradually from being fierce savages become civilized or humane, and from being humane become soft and sluggish, and seek to excel one another not in virtue, but in ostentation and luxury. And hence they begin to put off their native manners and to put on foreign ones, that is, to become slaves. (*PT* 10. 4)

[xvii] Note 71 in chapter 3 of Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

LS: So in other words, the great problem of institutions. Institutions cannot guarantee that they will be animated by the proper spirit. There must be something more than law, and that was the reason why the ancients said: virtue to be brought about by education, moral education. Here the problem is stated. What is Spinoza's solution to that problem?

Reader:

> To avoid these evils many have tried to establish sumptuary laws; but in vain. For all laws which can be broken without any injury to another, are counted but a laughing-stock, and are so far from bridling the desires and lusts of men, that on the contrary they stimulate them. For "we are ever eager for forbidden fruit, and desire what is denied."[xviii]

LS: So we are ever eager.

Reader:

> Nor do idle men ever lack ability to elude the laws which are instituted about things, which cannot absolutely be forbidden—

LS: "Which can absolutely not be forbidden," you can also translate.

Reader:

> as banquets, plays, ornaments, and the like, of which only the excess is bad; and that is to be judged according to the individual's fortune, so that it cannot be determined by any general law. (*PT* 10. 5)

LS:[24] That is a very important point. We say laws are not enough: moral education. But how does moral education take place? It also includes laws, but laws which are directed toward the strengthening of virtue, let us say, and the weakening of vice. And one kind of such laws which were particularly important in the past were sumptuary laws. Spinoza says they are no good. Well, you will think naturally in the first place of Prohibition,[xix] which was the last experiment in this direction. Gambling laws would of course also fall under the same heading.

Now Spinoza lays down here a principle of utmost importance, and I myself am very happy to read it because it confirms so clearly what I always say, although I[25] hadn't remember[ed] that. All laws which can be violated without any injury of another are a laughing stock. That is the question of what I call horizontal or vertical limitation. Let me put it this way. Let this be the actual conduct of men. That is how men ought to live: virtue. The vertical limitation. Certain prohibitions and commands. Spinoza says these kinds of things are absolutely ineffective. But what is effective is if you hurt the other fellow. The prohibition against murder or against theft or against fraud is inherently much more effective than the prohibition against luxury, for example, because luxury doesn't hurt anyone. But if you commit fraud you hurt the other fellow and the other fellow reacts violently. And the expression of this violent reaction is the law, an effective law with teeth in it. That is the notion. But Spinoza of course does not merely say that such

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[xviii] The phrase in quotes is a reference to Ovid, *Amores* III.iv.17.

[xix] In place in the United States from 1920 to 1933.

limitations from above, as exemplified by sumptuary laws, is not possible; he also says it is not desirable, because he says towards the end [that] only the excess is bad, not the thing in itself.

Now I think the argument is simply not true as stated, as is shown by the many societies which have severe prohibitions from above which are effective: think of Saudi Arabia with its prohibitions against smoking and drinking, and [it is] working perfectly. It is simply not true. In other words, it is not the intrinsic impossibility;[26] the impossibility arises from the previous belief in the undesirability. Of course, the thing is in practice a bit more complicated. Say in this country you have the situation that certain parts of the population, say, of Puritan origin, really think gambling is evil. People coming from Central Europe think gambling is not evil. And that is the reason why, I think, these things are not enforceable in this country, because half of the population is not Puritan, and half of the population is Puritan. And by some strange accident the Puritan part was able to impose its will temporarily regarding drinking, and permanently regarding gambling. That is a very special case. But the principle that such laws should not be enforceable I think is just wrong. Given certain conditions they are not enforceable, but not simply, not universally.

So in other words,[27] [as] Spinoza[28] states the problem: laws in the ordinary sense are not enough. You need more. You need virtue. But then he goes on: Don’t believe you can get any virtues through legislation. That played a tremendous role in the seventeenth-eighteenth century. But here again there is a subtle fallacy. The argument in the stricter form is stated as follows. Virtue is voluntary. If you are compelled to act virtuously you do not act virtuously[29]. That is in a way true. But unfortunately no one is born virtuously; virtue is acquired by habituation, and it may very well be that a certain process of compulsory habituation is necessary for the later virtuous practice of virtue. If the simple argument were correct, as stated by Milton for example—you know, Milton, who prepared this libertarian view [that] a man should be exposed to all evils, so that he can freely choose the good,[xx30] [then] if the government prevents evil from meeting him, it destroys his freedom. But if this argument were true, we should send all little girls as soon as they are three years old into brothels so that they learn and then acquire the freedom from evil by experience of it, which is manifest nonsense. But if this is so, then of course there is no objection in principle to a legislation which tries to bring about decent external conduct which, one can hope, will in the better cases lead eventually to genuine decency. That is what Plato and Aristotle meant. They were aware of the fact that the mere external decency is only a shadow of virtue, but it can also be a preparation for virtue, and therefore it is not to be dismissed. How Spinoza finds a solution you will find beautifully in the next paragraph.

Reader:

> I conclude, therefore, that the common vices of peace, of which we are here speaking, are never to be directly, but indirectly forbidden; that is, by laying such foundations of dominion, that the result may be, that the majority, I do not say are anxious to live wisely (for that is impossible), but are guided by those passions whence the republic has most advantage.

[xx] John Milton, *Areopagitica* (1644).

LS: That is a bit weakly translated. "By which it comes about that the many, or the majority, do not strive to live wisely, for this is impossible, but that they are guided by those passions from which there arises a greater utility for the commonwealth." Yes?

Reader:

> And therefore the chief point to be studied is, that the rich may be, if not thrifty, yet avaricious. For there is no doubt, that, if this passion of avarice, which is general and lasting, be encouraged by the desire of glory, most people would set their chief affection upon increasing their property without disgrace, in order to acquire honours, while avoiding extreme infamy. If then we examine the foundations of both kinds of aristocracy which I have explained in the last two chapters, we shall see, that this very result follows from them. For the number of rulers in both is so large, that most of the rich have access to government and to the offices of the dominion open to them. (*PT* 10. 6)

LS: What then is the solution to this great problem of the limitations of law? What is the key which solves the problem? No sumptuary laws, no attempt to establish decent conduct in the traditional sense, but what? Avarice.

Student: Encouraging acquisitiveness?

LS: He uses the word avarice. I believe that is, as far as I know, the strongest statement of this interesting principle. This passion of avarice which is universal and constant, i.e., which is effective, which you can trust, that is the substitute for moral education. An interesting thought, and of a very powerful political significance in modern times.

Student: Does this have any economic significance?

LS: Well, what does economics mean?

Student: Increasing the wealth of the state.

LS:[31] It didn't mean [that] originally. Originally it meant the management of the household, i.e., one's own estate. You increase there[32] [your] fortune. Political economy is an outgrowth of this notion that one of the greatest political instruments is the avarice of individuals. Someone a generation after Spinoza, [Mandeville], wrote a book called *Private Vice, Public Benefit*,[33xxi] and that is exactly the point which Mandeville makes. These vices such as luxury, avarice, are private vices, but they are public benefits; and therefore the laws should not forbid them or prevent them but encourage them. Well, there is an element of truth which Plato recognized in his wisdom in the *Republic* when he discussed oligarchy in the eighth book: there is no restraint; there everyone lives as he lists. But Spinoza means [that] if there is a premium on increasing one's fortune, this passion is of course strengthened. And the premium is very simple: that is done by a simple law. Partly not even law—as we have seen, membership in the council requires that you have much time, and therefore only the wealthy can in fact participate. But in addition, of course you can also have a law saying that only those who have such-and-such, or are worth so-and-so much, or have an income of so-and-so much a year, can be full members. Then that is a much better and

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[xxi] See session 9, n. ii.

simpler device and much more conducive to the well being of the community than any laws directly intending the moral improvement. The funny thing of course is that Spinoza, who here calls avarice a universal affect, in his *Ethics* makes it clear that it is a vice and that the really good man would be free from it.[xxii] It is a formal contradiction because he calls it a universal affect: a universal affect would seem to be one which can be counted upon in every individual case. That is, I think, an amazingly strong statement. I don't remember[34] [a statement] in these early times which is as strong as that by Spinoza.

So the solution, in other words, is: there are essential limitations to law in the ordinary sense of the word. That was always said. Therefore [others say]: education in virtue. Spinoza says: No, no education in virtue; that is utopian. Encourage those vices which are publicly beneficial, regardless of their moral quality. It is a realistic solution—realistic, that is to say, from the point of view of crude common sense, oblivious of the deeper problems. Let us read the next paragraph.

Reader:

> But if it be further ordained, that patricians who are insolvent be deposed from patrician rank, and that those who have lost their property by misfortune be restored to their former position, there is no doubt that all will try their best to keep their property. Moreover, they will never desire foreign costumes, nor disdain their native ones, if it is by law appointed, that patricians and candidates for office should be distinguished by a special robe, concerning which see Chap. VIII. secs. 25, 47. And besides these, other means may be devised in every dominion agreeable to the nature of its situation and the national genius, and herein it is above all to be studied, that the subjects may do their duty rather spontaneously than under pressure of the law.
>
> 8. For a dominion, that looks no farther than to lead men by fear, will be rather free from vices, than possessed of virtue. But men are so to be led, that they may think that they are not led, but living after their own mind, and according to their free decision; and so that they are restrained only by love of liberty, desire to increase their property, and hope of gaining the honours of the dominion. But effigies, triumphs, and other incitements to virtue, are signs rather of slavery than liberty. For rewards of virtue are granted to slaves, not freemen. I admit, indeed, that men are very much stimulated by these incitements; but, as in the first instance, they are awarded to great men, so afterwards, with the growth of envy, they are granted to cowards and men swollen with the extent of their wealth, to the great indignation of all good men. Secondly, those, who boast of their ancestors' effigies and triumphs, think they are wronged, if they are not preferred to others. Lastly, not to mention other objections, it is certain that equality, which once cast off the general liberty is lost, can by no means be maintained, from the time that peculiar honours are by public law decreed to any man renowned for his virtue. (*PT* 10. 7, 8)

[xxii] Discussed numerous places in the *Ethics*, including III Prop. 56 scholia; Definition of the Affects XLVII; and IV Prop. 44 scholia ("greed, ambition, and lust really are species of madness").

LS: An interesting picture. Encouragement of avarice and discouragement of love of glory. That is very revealing for what happened. When Montesquieu wrote his book, *Spirit of Laws*, 1748, he said: honor is the principle of monarchy, virtue is the principle of democracy. I cannot go into this very complicated argument of Montesquieu's, but ultimately it comes out in Montesquieu in the same way as in Spinoza, because Montesquieu was not in favor of democracy thus understood. He regards that as the principle of the ancient monarchies. What he had in mind was the new state, the great examples of which were England and Holland, the commercial modern republic in which avarice, one can say, will bring about gentle or humane manners as distinguished from pure manners, and the consideration of glory is left to the other regimes. That is a very striking formula. Let us also read the next paragraph.

Reader:

> After which premises, let us now see whether dominions of this kind can be destroyed by any cause to which blame attaches. But if any dominion can be everlasting, that will necessarily be so, whose constitution being once rightly instituted remains unbroken. For the constitution is the soul of a dominion. Therefore, if it is preserved, so is the dominion. But a constitution cannot remain unconquered, unless it is defended alike by reason and common human passion: otherwise, if it relies only on the help of reason, it is certainly weak and easily overcome. Now since the fundamental constitution of both kinds of aristocracy has been shown to agree with reason and common human passion, we can therefore assert that these, if any kinds of dominion, will be eternal, in other words, that they cannot be destroyed by any cause to which blame attaches, but only by some inevitable fate. (*PT* 10. 9)

LS: Meaning by accident which is too strong to be overcome. I note only one point. The state as described here by Spinoza is not a rational state simply.[35] Reason would be much too weak, as he emphasizes; its decisive support comes from the passions, and the passion most emphatically mentioned, as we have seen, is avarice. It is a modern commercial state, which was believed to be in deeper harmony with the requirements of virtue than the older states. Spinoza was not an avaricious man; naturally he was thinking of something else, but he felt there was some compatibility, a deeper compatibility of that state with the requirement of true virtue than with the traditional state, whatever form it may be.

Now a few words have to be said about the last chapter which is the beginning of Spinoza's discussion of democracy. You see only four and a half pages have been written by him. He died obviously without finishing it. Let us read that. In a way that is the most important subject. Yes?

Reader:

> I pass at length, to the third and perfectly absolute dominion, which we call democracy.

LS: It is simply absolute because the whole powers of the whole community are united in the sovereign, whereas in the others only either one man or a small part.

Reader:

> The difference between this and aristocracy consists, we have said, chiefly in this, that in an aristocracy it depends on the supreme council's will and free choice only, that this or that man is made a patrician, so that no one has the right to vote or fill public offices by inheritance, and that no one can by right demand this right, as is the case in the dominion, whereof we are now treating. For all, who are born of citizen parents, or on the soil of the country, or who have deserved well of the republic, or have accomplished any other conditions upon which the law grants to a man right of citizenship; they all, I say, have a right to demand for themselves the right to vote in the supreme council and to fill public offices, nor can they be refused it, but for crime or infamy. (*PT* 11. 1)

LS: In other words, democracy is a regime in which all or some have a legal claim to membership in the sovereign. In an aristocracy no one has a legal claim. He can only be co-opted by those who are already members of the sovereign body.

Reader:

> If, then, it is by a law appointed, that the elder men only, who have reached a certain year of their age, or the first-born only, as soon as their age allows, or those who contribute to the republic a certain sum of money, shall have the right of voting in the supreme council and managing the business of the dominion; then, although on this system the result might be, that the supreme council would be composed of fewer citizens than that of the aristocracy—

LS: Do you see that this could easily happen?

Reader:

> of which we treated above, yet, for all that, dominions of this kind should be called democracies, because in them the citizens, who are destined to manage affairs of state, are not chosen as the best by the supreme council, but are destined to it by a law. And although for this reason dominions of this kind, that is, where not the best, but those who happen by chance to be rich, or who are born eldest, are destined to govern, are thought inferior to an aristocracy; yet, if we reflect on the practice or general condition of mankind, the result in both cases will come to the same thing. For patricians will always think those the best, who are rich, or related to themselves in blood, or allied by friendship. And, indeed, if such were the nature of patricians, that they were free from all passion, and guided by mere zeal for the public welfare in choosing their patrician colleagues, no dominion could be compared with aristocracy. But experience itself teaches us only too well, that things pass in quite a contrary manner, above all, in oligarchies, where the will of the patricians, from the absence of rivals, is most free from the law. For there the patricians intentionally keep away the best men from the council, and seek for themselves such colleagues in it, as hang upon their words, so that in such a dominion things are in a much more unhappy condition, because the choice of patricians depends entirely upon the arbitrary will of a few, which is free or unrestrained by any law. But I return to my subject. (*PT* 11. 2)

LS: So here there is a reference, a momentary reference to what aristocracy originally meant: the rule of the best. And that is perhaps Spinoza's reasoning: if aristocracy is rule of the best, then

there can no legal arrangement as to who is to be a member of the sovereign body, because who [is] or who is not best must be determined by men on the spot and therefore in practice by the best who constitute the sovereign body at any given time.

Now I think Spinoza's argument against aristocracy can be stated very simply as follows, especially with a view to what he said in chapter 1. An aristocracy proper is impossible. Very simply stated, it is impossible because [the notion] that men of genuine virtue should be able to rule is a utopian affair (you remember what he said in the first chapter) and therefore let's forget about that. The better solution is the one in which citizenship is regulated. But once this is granted, then there is of course no reason why it should be arbitrarily limited, for example, to the first born or to the rich. Therefore from this point of view it would follow, just as was suggested in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*: universal citizenship. Let us read the sequel. That goes a bit too far, as you will see immediately.

Reader:

> From what has been said in the last section, it is manifest that we can conceive of various kinds of democracy. But my intention is not to treat of every kind, but of that only, "wherein all, without exception, who owe allegiance to the laws of the country only, and are further independent and of respectable life, have the right of voting in the supreme council and of filling the offices of the dominion."[xxiii]

LS: In other words,[36] in his discussion of the best form of democracy, he wants to limit himself to that in which there are no arbitrary limitations. That's clear. That's implied. All who are subject to the laws should be citizens—with the qualification of course that they must not be criminals, that would exclude them. But we will see that is not quite exact.

Reader:

> I say expressly, "who owe allegiance to the laws of the country only," to exclude foreigners, who are treated as being under another's dominion. I added, besides, "who are independent," except in so far as they are under allegiance to the laws of the dominion, to exclude women and slaves, who are under the authority of men and masters, and also children and wards, as long as they are under the authority of parents and guardians. I said, lastly, "and of respectable life," to exclude, above all, those that are infamous from crime, or some disgraceful means of livelihood. (*PT* 11. 3)

LS: So in other words, say, prostitutes, to take the most obvious example, could not be citizens, apart from the fact that they are women. But let us say males who live from prostitutes would be excluded. But I wouldn't translate *servus* by "slave"; I would translate it by "servant." That was a rather common limitation, which you find still at the end of the eighteenth century, for example in Kant, where a distinction is made between active and passive citizens. All employees, workers in a factory, peasants who are only tenants [and] not owners of the land, and so on, are dependents, and dependents cannot be active citizens. That [such a thing is a matter of course] I think[37] Spinoza implies: if you are in personal dependence by your profession, clearly as a domestic servant but also as working in a factory for someone else, you cannot be a full citizen.

[xxiii] The phrase in quotes is not a citation; Spinoza is emphasizing the sentence and will decompose its parts in the text that follows.

And Rousseau takes this as a matter of course too, by the way, this limitation. Now with this limitation, I would say Spinoza was a democrat, as we have seen, in spite of all the complexities we have mentioned on an earlier occasion.

The book ends, in its fragmentary form, on a sad note, as we could say in the presence of the ladies we have here, because here he raises the question: Is it fair to exclude women? To our universal regret, he says yes. But I think it would be nicer not to read it. He has all kinds of old-fashioned notions. For example, if men would sit together with women in a council all kinds of flirtations and other irrelevancies would disturb the serious proceedings, and we know from Margaret Smith and other ladies that this just isn't true.[xxiv]

It is rather late, so I can't do more now than to leave you with a problem. I think the *Political Treatise* as a whole makes it clear that Spinoza was in favor of democracy as he understood it. It was not a democracy of working men; it was a democracy of people who are their own masters in this sense: [they] are not economically dependent. That is clear. But with this limitation, he was in favor of democracy, as appears from this treatise, which is a philosophic work not influenced by any apologetic or theological considerations. And the real task of an adequate interpretation of Spinoza's teaching would be to bring this into full harmony with his very complicated statements of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. And I believe if one would do such an analysis, one could come down to two principles which create all the trouble. First is Spinoza's acceptance of the old classical distinction between the wise and the vulgar, and this leads him surely into an anti-democratic or non-democratic way, and creates also a certain indifference. Freedom, true freedom, is possible in every regime, and why should he therefore prefer democracy?

The other great element in Spinoza's thought is that stemming from Machiavelli, which is in clear opposition to the classical view and where the higher considerations, the vertical element, is disregarded, and where the question is raised: How can you have the maximum of freedom and security for each? Machiavelli's answer is also surely a republic,[38] [though] Machiavelli understood it differently, [a] republic. The model is in a way Rome, the Rome of the good times: a warlike aristocracy and a warlike plebs—an armed plebs working together with a warlike aristocracy and maintaining themselves in good shape, in the pink of condition, by a rather tough foreign policy. So in other words, there is a union of interests created between these clashing classes against the subjects, actual or potential. That was roughly what Machiavelli suggested. But Spinoza is much more humane and the solution is brought about by something which in Machiavelli plays only a very subordinate role, and that is commerce: commerce, or to use a term which Spinoza doesn't hesitate to use, avarice, that [passion] animating the most vigorous part of the population, making them greatly interested in peace.[39] [Although in one sense utterly selfish], the increase of one's fortune depends somehow in its effects on the well being of all. And to find an affect, that is the theoretical problem, which is utterly selfish—because if it is not selfish it is weak, it cannot be trusted, so it must be selfish—but which, while being selfish, has accidentally beneficial effects on the others. Avarice. Avarice doesn't lead to the spirit of love in itself, as other things go. But[40] [it sets] others to work, not because[41] [they] love people, but

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[xxiv] Margaret Chase Smith (R, Maine) was elected to the U.S. House in 1940 and the Senate in 1948, the first woman to be elected to both.

because it redounds to[42] [their] own benefit. That scheme is not fully elaborated by Spinoza, but Spinoza obviously is one of the five or six greatest minds who contributed to its emergence.

And finally of course the full flower of it is political economy. From a purely bibliographic point of view I believe they trace political economy to Sir William Petty, *Political Arithmetic*; that was written in 1680 or so.[xxv] Political arithmetic; and the arithmetic had very much to do with trade and income. Sir William Petty was a personal pupil of Hobbes, by the way. You see they go back to the same famous names. Now what was the key empirical basis for Sir William Petty? The Low Countries, Holland, the country in which Spinoza lived and with a view to which he wrote this book, as we have seen. That was the place where the new political notion was tested for the first time. Even in Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*—which is a crucially important book for this problem—the stock exchange in Amsterdam, that is the great political invention although it is in itself not political. Why? Because here a power has been created, entirely unpolitical in itself, and yet on which all the potentates of Europe depended for their loans. That seemed to offer the possibility of the depolitization of human life, i.e., of a more peaceful, of a more humane human life. And economic liberalism as it exists today still tries to continue that hope. And their argument, which is not altogether unreasonable, is this: they have never been given a fair test. You have never had a situation of perfectly free trade all over the globe, and so you cannot say: Well, it could not be the remedy for all our ills. So the argument is in a way not possible as an empirical argument, and therefore the issue is still in a way open. Good. So we leave it at that.

End of Course

[1] Deleted "here"
[2] Deleted "are more"
[3] Deleted "even"
[4] Deleted "itself"
[5] Deleted "Now"
[6] Deleted "then"
[7] Deleted "for example"
[8] Deleted "say"
[9] Deleted "Yes?"
[10] Deleted "the objection therefore was" moved "in former times"
[11] Deleted "him"
[12] Deleted "political elements"
[13] Deleted "that"
[14] Deleted "in a way"
[15] Deleted "And then we have that"
[16] Deleted "also"
[17] Deleted "and that there are elements, of course, not the presence of human beings, and that there are of"
[18] Deleted "and"
[19] Deleted "because what is true of"
[20] Deleted "You see?"
[21] Deleted "he makes"
[22] Deleted "he makes"
[23] Deleted "especially"
[24] Deleted "So in other words. Now"
[25] Deleted "didn't"

[xxv] See footnote in session 3.

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[26] Deleted "but"
[27] Deleted "what"
[28] Deleted "says – he"
[29] Deleted "because – sure"
[30] Deleted "The government has no right to"
[31] Moved "That"
[32] Deleted "each one his"
[33] Moved "Mandeville"
[34] Deleted "one"
[35] Deleted "It is a state which"
[36] Deleted "Spinoza wants to have"
[37] Deleted "is a matter of course limitation which"
[38] Deleted "A republic in which – but"
[39] Deleted "And which by its own innate tendencies – although utterly selfish; avarice – and"
[40] Deleted "setting"
[41] Deleted "he"
[42] Deleted "his"